Telling Deep Time:
Geologic Narration in German Fiction since 1945

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Chapter 1:
Into the Deep

How can literature help us understand the vast temporal dimensions of the geologic past and the place of humans within such an expansive temporality? In *Telling Deep Time: Geologic Narration and German Fiction after 1945*, I examine works of German-language fiction that bring the deep past to life in narrative dimensions to answer the question of how meaningful stories can be told that span both human history and natural history of the deep past, navigating the enormous temporal differences that separate them. The central works for this investigation are Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* (*Man in the Holocene*, 1979), Peter Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr* (*Slow Homecoming,* 1979), and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* (*Visitation*, 2008). All three authors treat the nonhuman environment as a dynamic entity whose ability to make meaning comes into existence through narrative. I claim that the combination of human stories and the deep past demands distinct narrative strategies, three of which I examine in this dissertation.

The main questions that guide my project concern how stories of the deep past are told in works of fiction. I am interested in who or what narrates stories that take place well before human existence and how such nonhuman stories are made compelling to the reader. Because the temporal scale of the deep past is vastly greater than that of recent human history, I also question whether stories told on a geologic time scale risk masking human violence and suffering and consider what narrative techniques allow for authors to tell both human and nonhuman stories. Additionally, with a focus on nonhuman agents in the past, I am interested in which ways nonhuman agents produce meaning in a narrative,

how this meaning is interpreted and by whom. My focus on nonhuman agents in fiction leads to the main theoretical question that frames my research: how are theories of material ecocriticism that are concerned with nonhuman agents compatible with narratology and how does their combination add to interpretations and analyses of fiction texts? In order to investigate these questions, I also consider what role scientific understanding plays in fiction works about the deep past. Do stories about geologic history require certain scientific knowledge? And if so, how accurate must depictions of specific landscapes or geologic processes be? How do authors incorporate scientific knowledge into works of fiction?

The contemporary theoretical debates I am exploring have been largely tied to parallel conversations about the Anthropocene. In the beginning stages of this project, I imagined my research in terms of the Anthropocene, the proposed geologic era for the current moment in which humans have altered the planet on a such a scale that it is akin to previous shifts in geologic history. The term Anthropocene offers us a way to talk about the extensive damage humans have caused to the nonhuman environment that reaches beyond climate change and global warming to also include ocean acidification, species extinction and biodiversity loss. On the one hand, the term Anthropocene is a convenient catchall that highlights the current state of environmental degradation. On the other hand, however, many scholars and activists have rightly criticized the term for its inability to address the large inequalities of these environmental effects—that is, that the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene is not all humans as the word suggests. Rather, those who are most threatened by the effects of climate change contributed much less to it, while those responsible for high emissions and pollution are the ones who can afford to ignore

the consequences in the short term. In the course of my research process, however, it became clear that the concept of the Anthropocene was only a stepping stone to imagine the temporal dimensions that interest me. For it is precisely the temporal that makes the changes occurring in the Anthropocene so alarming—changes, which, in the absence of human influence, would take hundreds of thousands of years to occur through natural processes. I am curious about how fiction expands the temporal dimension to include the deep past and in order to consider this question, it is important to break down a number of theoretical positions and key terms from material ecocriticism and narratology.

Background and Theory

Theories of material ecocriticism that explore the agentic capacity of matter and its intra-action with other matter and humans to create meaning provide a robust framework for analyzing narratives of deep time in the three novels I discuss. Scholars working in material ecocriticism, particularly Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, describe the world as a complex entanglement of people, things, and discourse that all intertwine to create meaning. Their framing sheds light on the complex processes that make up the world, and the meaning produced by each instance of entanglement. Seen through the lens of material ecocriticism, matter is relevant and nonhuman nature emerges as a dynamic entity, existing and changing both independent of, and, through intra-action with humans.[1] Scholars of material ecocriticism frame the world as "a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman

[1] There has been a similar interest in the material realm from scholars of history that parallels historical studies of the deep past. See Lecain's *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (2017) and Shyrock and Smail's *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (2011).

players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces" (Iovino and Opperman *Material Ecocriticism* 1-2). Several scholars of material ecocriticism have looked at the way the body is entwined with the "more-than-human" world (Alaimo "Oceanic"), at "dirty aesthetics" and toxic landscapes (Sullivan "Ecology"), and at a number of other entanglements between humans and nonhumans.[2]

Moreover, material ecocriticism provides a framework to approach each instance of entanglement between humans and nonhumans as a "site of narrativity." Iovino writes, "[i]f matter is agentic, and endowed with meanings, every material formation, from bodies to their contexts of living, is 'telling,' and therefore can be the object of a critical investigation aimed at discovering its stories, its material and discursive interplays, its place in a world filled with expressive – or narrative – forces" ("Living Diffractions" 70). The body is a privileged site of narrativity and many examples focused on the body demonstrate the interpretive practices of material ecocriticism. Scholars in material ecocriticism see "human beings and bodies *in terms* of their relations, intra-actions, or coproduction and coemergence with their surroundings rather than as separable subjects or objects" (Sullivan 89-90, original emphasis). From an interpretive standpoint, it is straightforward to trace material agency of, for example, toxins (Oppermann "Hybridity"), light (Sullivan "Ecology") and plastic (Alaimo "Oceanic") with and within the human body.

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[2] Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality frames the body as interconnected with material flows, showing that the boundaries of the material self are porous. Heather Sullivan questions whether flows of people, matter, and pollution can still be considered as out of place in a radically altered environment.

What has yet to be examined in previous scholarship, though, is how theories of material ecocriticism can account for the material changes in the deep past and the specific narrative strategies used to tell such "sedimented" stories.[3] In the case of geologic formations and natural history, the sedimentation of material forces is more than a metaphor and turning to the German can help to understand the narrative potential of the deep past—the word for history and narrative are both *Geschichte*. Tracing and interpreting the storied matter and narrative agency of geologic processes of the deep past, on the other hand, poses a challenge in the absence of a human reader. Oppermann names storied matter and narrative agency as "[t]he central concepts of material ecocriticism…that explain the agentic dimension of living matter in terms of stories embodied in material formations," but doesn't provide an interpretive framework for understanding either, nor does she go into detail on how such storied matter is narrated, which is a question I explore in the following chapters ("From Material to Posthuman Ecocriticism" 283). It is striking that scholars of material ecocriticism evoke narratology in their terminology, yet they have not yet articulated how nonhuman matter's agency is

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[3] Scholars interested in Victorian literature have examined how early geologist were deeply influenced by literature, reminding us that the two have always been closely connected and that the strict disciplinary boundaries that exist today did not separate natural sciences from literature in the past. Adelene Buckland, for instance, argues that Victorian geologists drew inspiration from the structure of books to understand the layers that record the earth's past as chapters. Beyond structural similarities, narrative was a key tool for understanding the continuity of the deep past and that humans emerged as part of the same continuity. See Buckland's *Novel Science*: *Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology* (2013), Beer's *Darwin's Plot: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2000) and Zimmerman's *Excavating Victorians* (2008).

manifested in a text.[4] By looking at nonhuman stories of the geologic past, my research brings material ecocriticism in conversation with narratology, bridging the existing theoretical gap.

The key concepts from narrative theory that I focus on include narration, the distinction between story and discourse and focalization. My concern with narration is closely tied to the distinction Günther Müller draws between *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit*. *Erzählzeit* is the time of narration determined by the measurable duration of a story. *Erzählte Zeit*, in contrast, is the narrated time of a story. The stories of the deep past that I examine in this dissertation exhibit the profound disproportionality of these conceptual frameworks for narrations about deep time because they have an *erzählte Zeit* that spans beyond tens of thousands of years, while the *Erzählzeit* is limited to the length of a novel or novella. This comparison reveals a juxtaposition that exemplifies my interest in the distinction between story, a sequence of events that takes place, and discourse, the way in which the story is told. The story of the deep past is wholly nonhuman, yet the interpreting and telling of the story (discourse) is bound to human perception and cognition; at stake here is the combination of material ecocriticism (understanding the story) and narratology (understanding its telling).

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[4]Erin James brings together the tools and concerns of ecocritical analysis with narrative theory in her 2015 monograph *The Storyworld Accord: Toward and Econarratology*, thereby beginning to bridge a large gap that has existed between ecocriticism and narratology. While she does not consider the material dimensions of narrative, her perceptive analyses are focused on postcolonial texts and show how narratives and storyworlds can allow for a reader to imagine and inhabit a novel's environmental dimensions.

The question of the narrator of the geologic past is also pertinent to my analyses. In each of the three works I consider, there is an extradiegetic third person narrator outside the narrative. However, as I explore in the following chapters, each author purposely conceals the precise boundaries of narration. One of the central concepts of in my discussion of narration is that focalization—the filtering of events through a certain figure—is crucial to narratives with a larger *erzählte Zeit* because it allows for authors to present varying views over a long period of time. The classic distinction between narrator and means of focalization concentrates on the difference between the figure that speaks (the narrator) and the figure who sees (the focalizor). Thus, although a narrator might be extradiegetic, the narration can still be focalized though a figure in the text. As I will explore in chapter four, the emphasis on sight in focalization is complicated when a figure cannot see, leading me to explore other ways in which focalization can function corporeally. These are the narrative puzzles that lead me to consider what narrative strategies authors use to tell the stories of the deep past.

Telling Deep Time

In the chapters that follow, I examine three works of fiction that I argue tell stories on a geologic time scale with an eye to developing interpretations that explain this temporal puzzle. My work departs from previous scholarship in that I consider the focus on geology as closely related to temporality, rather than as a thematic element. Therefore, the attention to geology in these works represents a turn to the deep past and to a history that involves nonhuman actors. I focus on narrative fiction after 1945 for two main

reasons. First, it is important not to disregard of human stories that articulate important issues of human violence, suffering and injustice, including the atrocities of the Holocaust. While only two of the texts examined here deal directly with the Holocaust, a project on decentering the human must not lose sight of the importance of human life and the systematic attempts to take the lives of people. Second, fiction from the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond starts to include signs of contemporary environmental awareness.

In order to understand stories of the deep past, I argue that we must consider the theories of material ecocriticism detailed above to ultimately arrive at a conception of what I call geologic narration. The first two texts I analyze, Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* and Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr*, were both published in 1979. However, the two differ greatly in form. Frisch's *Erzählung* is a collage of images and text while Handke's novel is filled with his characteristically dense and complicated prose. Both share a thematic similarity by virtue of their focus on the geologic past. While other scholars have found it productive to compare the two works, they have only done so in terms of their thematic similarities, rather than focusing on the issues of temporality that I wish to foreground. Michael Butler, for example, considers Frisch and Handke as postwar writers on the "neutral periphery" of German-language literature because the Swiss and Austrian authors, respectively, were not tied to World War II and the Holocaust as German authors were and they thus viewed their subjects "in more general, humanistic terms rather than with strict, historical specificity" (232).[5] Georg

[5] Though, as I discuss in Chapter 3, Handke engages with a deep sense of historical guilt in *Langsame Heimkehr*.

Braungart, in 2007, argued that Frisch and Handke offer a trans-human perspective connected to the sublime through their focus on geology. He writes of the two works of fiction that "[b]eide kamen zufälligerweise im selben Jahr 1979 heraus, und beide sind, im weitesten Sinne ebenfalls vor dem Hintergrund der Ökodebatte zu sehen, zugleich ästhetische Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Problem des Verhältnisses zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst…"[6] (23-24). More recently, Timothy Attanucci compared Handke's and Frisch's focus on geology as tied to a Freudian affront to humanity, but Attanucci does not engage with the role of geology in the two works beyond the thematic focus. In contrast to Frisch and Handke, the third novel I consider, Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* (2008), has been the focus of a number of ecocritical analyses, yet none considers the geologic scale of the novel in depth.[7]

With the question of temporality in mind, I begin my exploration in the next chapter, "Narrating a Valley in Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*," where I look at Frisch's 1979 novella as a narrative of the geologic past. Frisch's text is a collage of text and image that reveals the protagonist, Herr Geiser, is suffering from rapidly worsening memory loss. The images that are scattered throughout the text are clippings from published reference books and hand-written notes that the reader must follow in order to reconstruct the protagonist's thought process. Herr Geiser is isolated in his small Swiss town following days of rain and he fears that the extreme weather might trigger a

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[6] "both were published coincidentally in the same year, 1979, and both are, set against the backdrop of the environmental debate in the broadest sense, an aesthetic examination of the problem of the relationship between science and art..."
[7] See Axel Goodbody "Heimat and the Place of Humans in the World" and Sandra Kohler "Reflections on Loss."

landslide that would cover his village. He therefore carefully studies the rock formations around him looking for any changes and looks to works of nonfiction in order to confirm his fears. In my analysis of the novella, I consider the role of nonhuman agents in the novella through perspectives from material ecocriticism to demonstrate how glaciers, rain and other nonhuman entities play an important narrative role in the novella. Examination of these materials allows me then to establish four distinct temporalities that Frisch weaves together in the text: geologic time, individual human time, collective human time and a temporality beyond the human. Finally, I turn to the matter of clippings in the text and consider their role in the narrative and the material and spatial demands placed on the text as a whole as a result of the inclusion the physical clippings.

Where Frisch creates a collage of fiction prose and nonfiction images to narrate the deep past, Handke confines his geologic narration to prose in *Langsame Heimkehr*. In my third chapter, "The Incredulous Geologist: Language, Narration and Doubt in Peter Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr*," I focus on the novel's protagonist, a European geologist, whose work raises critical questions regarding representations of the deep past. Handke frames the geologist's work as directly linked to language; Sorger, the protagonist, must "read" the past in the land formations that he studies and then record that past in written form. Sorger, however, suffers from an estrangement and a crisis of form that affects his work and he doubts the ability of human language to capture the geologic past. I closely examine Sorger's estrangement to show how he finds grounding through a concept of history that connects the deep past with human history. To explore the nature of this connection, I turn to Handke's personal journals and the geology textbooks he studied to contextualize my findings.

In the fourth chapter "Stratigraphy and Sight: Focalization in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung*," I focus on key questions that pertain to narratology. Erpenbeck's 2008 novel begins with a poetic description of a lake's formation over tens of thousands of years in the past. The sections that follow in the novel alternate between a seemingly eternal gardener and the various people who come to inhabit the lakeshore and the house that is eventually built there over the course of the 20th century. The novel's explicitly layered structure mirrors the earth's strata and embeds the narrative in the context of deep time. In my analysis, I examine how Erpenbeck uses focalization to provide different perspectives on the human history of the century while also remaining connected to the deep past through the figure of the gardener. Additionally, I argue that the way in which focalization is accomplished is deeply tied to modes of perceptions—the visual in particular—and that Erpenbeck experiments with the trope of sight in narrative prose. This line of thinking, then, provides a way to analyze the novel's temporal dimensions by focusing on the formation of the glacial lake that Erpenbeck depicts in the book's prologue.

Summarizing implications of these findings in "Geologic Narration and Glaciers," I conclude with reflections on the representation of glaciers both to register a trope present in all three works and to explore future directions for the project of geologic narration. I argue that the larger scale of deep time offers an alternative to contemporary representations of glaciers that frame them as vanishing and without agency. Instead, the temporal framing of the deep past recasts glaciers as powerful agents in their own right, capable of forming lakes and carving out valleys and canyons. I survey a broad range of German-language fiction works that frame glaciers either as objects of exploration or as

vanishing as a result of anthropogenic climate change. While I do not want to minimize the enormous threat posed by melting glaciers, I argue that resituating glaciers as powerful elements representing the deep past makes this threat clear by highlighting their dynamic agency and their various temporally and spatially distributed states of existence—including as water that now threatens low-lying coastal regions. I frame my concept of geologic narration as a combination of material ecocriticism and historical geology. In other words, I consider the forces that shape the discursive world (material ecocriticism) and the forces that shape the material world (historical geology). In doing so I hope to begin to reveal the ways in which geologic narration in fiction has the potential to reorient readers to vast time scales and the long-term thinking that is necessary to address contemporary environmental problems.

Chapter 2:
Narrating a Valley in Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*

In 1972, the Swiss author Max Frisch was living in Berzona, a small village near Lake Maggiore in Ticino, when he received a gift from his friend and editor Uwe Johnson—*Der Lago Maggiore und seine Täler* (*Lake Maggiore and its Valleys*), a book about the region.[8] In a letter to Johnson thanking him for the present, Frisch writes, "Es kann sein, daß sie mir mit dem Geschenk, Ihrem kuriosen Fund in einem Antiquariat, etwas eingebrockt haben, etwas wie eine Erzählung"[9] (Briefwechsel 49-50). Seven years later, clippings from this book and a number of others would appear reprinted alongside Frisch's narrative text in the resulting book *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän: Eine Erzählung* (*Man in the Holocene: A Story*). The novella-like story follows an aging protagonist who also lives in Ticino, and who struggles with his weakening memory. In an attempt to retain his knowledge, the protagonist tapes hand-written notes and passages from history books and encyclopedias to his walls. The clippings appear as images in the book and create a striking collage that combines text and image as well as fiction and nonfiction.

As the title *Der mensch erscheint im Holozän* suggests,[10] Frisch explores the origins of humans in the novella, which also entails an investigation of the geologic past and the environmental conditions necessary for human life to exist. Additionally, he

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[8] Roman Bucheli points to Frisch and Johnson's correspondence and to the letter discussed here as an example of the autobiographical influences on his work (18-19).
[9] "It is possible that you have gotten me into a situation, something like a story (literally, narration), with your present, your odd find in an antiquarian bookshop." (this and following translations are mine unless otherwise stated).
[10] Literally translated the title would be *Man Appears in the Holocene*.

includes detailed information about the formation of the valley and the alpine region where he resides, looking into the deep past to illustrate how powerful glaciers sculpted the mountain peaks and landforms in the valley. The novella, therefore, tells both a human and nonhuman story, which, as Frisch further remarks to Johnson in his letter, was the inspiration for the text: "Es sind wieder Woche her, ich bin immer neugieriger geworden und habe noch einiges dazu gefunden. Jetzt müßte es nur noch gelingen, nämlich: ein Tal zu erzählen"[11] (Briefwechsel 50). The curious goal here, "ein Tal zu erzählen" ("to narrate a valley"), raises a key question of interest to this research project and to scholars in material ecocriticism: how is it possible to narrate nonhuman stories?

In this chapter, I examine how Frisch narrates the deep past through his collage of image and text that highlights multiple temporalities and the agency of the nonhuman. Following a brief overview of the plot, a discussion of the environmental aspects of *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* and other interpretive insights, I will turn to perspectives of material ecocriticism to demonstrate how Frisch's novella highlights nonhuman material forces and the position of the human relative to other nonhuman agencies. Specifically, I look at glaciers as a material representation of nonhuman agency, their role in the text as a nonhuman agent, and at the function of rain as significant narrative element. Then I establish and analyze four temporalities at play in the novel—individual human time, collective human time, geologic/deep time and a temporality beyond the human—and how they function to create a commentary on the relationship of humans to nonhuman nature. Finally, I turn to an investigation of the clippings included in the text, considering

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[11] "Once again it has been weeks and I have become more curious and have even found some things. Now it just has to succeed, namely: to narrate a valley."

the intermediality of the novella and the spatial demands of creating text/image collage in a bound, material text.

Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän begins with the protagonist, a 73-year-old retired man called Herr Geiser, passing the time by attempting to build a pagoda out of crisp bread. Days of rain have caused floods that have blocked roads in and out of the small village where he lives in the Italian-speaking Swiss canton of Ticino.[12] As the bad weather continues, Herr Geiser fears that it could cause further damage to the surrounding natural formations and potentially lead to a landslide or crumble an entire rock face, thereby burying the valley. He continues his attempts to pass the time by documenting different types of thunder and taking an inventory of the food and supplies he has in the house. Partly because of his efforts to categorize and take stock of things around him, he begins to question the foundations of his knowledge and turns to looking up information in his collection of reference books and encyclopedias. As if to ensure that these facts won't disappear from his memory, he begins to clip out information from the books and tape them to his wall, going so far as to remove a portrait of his late wife in order to make more room for the papers (86). These clippings appear alongside the text in the novella, forcing the reader to follow Herr Geiser's train of thought and ultimately revealing that he is also struggling with *Gedächtnisschwäche*—weakness of memory. Frustrated with the seemingly slow progression of the days and troubled by his isolation, Herr Geiser attempts to hike out of the valley through a mountain pass and toward Italy where he could catch a train to his daughter in Basel, but the physical demands of the

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[12] At the time of writing the novella Frisch lived in Ticino in the small village of Berzona (Hage, 106-107).

hike combined with his weakened cognitive state prove to be too much for him and he turns around, despite having nearly made it to the next town. He arrives back home weakened and confused well over twelve hours after he set out. As the reader later discovers through an encyclopedia entry included in the text, Herr Geiser suffers a stroke and remains at home alone until his daughter comes to check on him.

Born in Zurich in 1911, Frisch studied German and worked in journalism before returning to university to study architecture at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in 1936. While working as an architect after the war, Frisch wrote and staged a number of plays and gained recognition in both arenas. As his success in writing grew and he published his journals and novels with the encouragement of the publisher Peter Suhrkamp, he devoted himself entirely to writing.[13] Published in 1979 when Frisch was 68, *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* is one of Frisch's late works and readers at the time of its publication were quick to assume the novella was autobiographical, like his novel *Montauk* which was published four years earlier, but Frisch dismissed such claims (Hage 117).[14]

Looking at the many scholarly interpretations of the work shows an overarching focus on issues of memory and aging, death, and natural disaster.[15] However, the novella raises important questions relevant to environmental thinking and its representation that

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[13] Hage, Petersen, Schütt and Wiedermann provide detailed biographical information on Frisch.
[14] For more on Frisch's late works see von Matt.
[15] Cankorel, Silber and Voorgang provide in-depth analyses of the topic of memory and memory loss in the novella and Haberl, Knapp and Schmenk all examine the role of death. Hajduk and Röthinger examine aging as a topic in this and other works of Frisch. Finally, Erhart and Kieser both consider the role of disaster and catastrophe in Frisch's oeuvre.

Frisch seems to anticipate. At the time of Frisch's first draft of the novel in 1972, tentatively titled both *Regen* (*Rain*) and *Klima* (*Climate*), human impact on the environment and climate was only just beginning to be understood (Kilcher 114). Still, the environmental movements of the 1970s that spread awareness of ecological degradation, pollution and energy shortages were in the public eye, meaning that Frisch was most likely aware of these environmental issues and throughout the novella there are numerous references to climate change, erosion and other environmental changes that are immediately recognizable by today's reader as human-induced phenomena. Given the novella's focus on the life of a single human figure, it is striking that Frisch includes a number of comments on ecological issues, both in his written text as remarks on the area and in the clippings and handwritten notes he includes. In the final pages of the novella, the constellation of clippings includes ones that describe the geologic past and progresses to ones that depict humans' influence on and altering of nature, such as erosion and invasive species, creating a narrative of human's impact on the earth. Although contemporary environmental thinking, ecocriticism and narratives about the Anthropocene were not present at the time of writing, there are a number of environmental themes throughout the novella that suggest that Frisch anticipates the kind of thinking that understands humans and the environment as in a reciprocal relationship.

Much of the commentary on environmental issues in the novella is presented in a straightforward way without comment or judgement. An encyclopedia entry on erosion, for example, describes how the natural process can be beneficial in certain cases, but excessive erosion caused by human mismanagement can lead to catastrophes like the desertification during the American dust bowl (*Holozän* 139). Additional entries detail

how chestnut trees were introduced to the Alps around 500 B.C. and describe the blight currently afflicting the trees and causing them to rot (139-140). The line "Viele Kastanien haben den Krebs"[16] is repeated three times in the same unembellished fashion, and the comment brings to mind issues of invasive species and connections between certain cancers and environmental factors (62; 103; 142). In a description of the valley area, the narrator notes how there is now waste disposal and how residents previously had thrown their refuse off the side of the slope (61). Displacement of animal species is also mentioned with the comment that "der letzte Adler, der dieses Tal beflogen haben soll, hängt seit dem Ersten Weltkrieg in einer verrauchten Wirtsstube"[17] (60-61). As one book reviewer noted in 1979, Frisch is more concerned with what remains beyond the human, insofar as he points to nonhuman environment and forces: "Nicht dem Menschen und seiner Seelenwelt gilt also das Interesse des Autors diesmal, sondern all dem, was ohne den Menschen da ist, was vor ihm und nach ihm da war und da sein wird: das Gestein, die Pflanzen, Naturphänomene wie Blitz und Donner, die Wirkung der Erosion, usw."[18] ("Die Steine"). Considering Frisch's account of environmental issues, we begin to see that Frisch anticipates issues that emerge in current environmental debates. In particular, his narrative project, "ein Tal zu erzählen" or to narrate a valley, signals an acute interest

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[16] "Many of the chestnut trees are cankered" (This and following translations of the novella are from Geoffrey Skelton's *Man in the Holocene*, 46; 79; 111).
[17] "the last eagle observed over this valley is now hanging in the smoky saloon of a tavern, where it has been since the First World War" (45).
[18] "It's not the human and his spiritual world that the author is interested in this time, rather it is everything that is there when the human is not, what came before the human and what will be there after the human: stones, plants, natural phenomena like lightning and thunder, the effects of erosion, etc."

in his nonhuman surroundings, the forces that created them and the ways in which such forces continue to co-exist alongside humans.

Contemporary analyses of the novella have been largely focused on these environmental dimensions, especially since the Anthropocene has become a topic of interest in the humanities. Timothy Attanucci examines the role of geology in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* (and compares this with Peter Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr*, the topic of Chapter 3, noting that geology, with its concern of eras and ends, is a fitting topic for an aging person. His arguments pick up from Georg Braungart who also compares Frisch's novella with Handke's and shows how the geologic dimension of both works helps to create a transhuman perspective. In the case of Frisch, the perspective extends beyond Her Geiser's single experience by means of the insights of human history and geology offered by the clippings in the text (32). Attanucci and Braungart rightly examine the works of Frisch and Handke together, noting the similarities in their focus on geology. However, they both only consider how geology functions in the text thematically, where my aim is to show how the material realm is an integral part of the narrative.

The ecocritical analyses of the novella bring up relevant insights regarding the relationship between humans and the nonhuman environment, especially in the context of contemporary environmental debates, but their findings also remain mostly on the level of content. For example, Urte Stobbe notes that while the novella's title hints at the appearance of humans, it is more concerned with their downfall, and accordingly "die ersten Anzeichen für die beginnende Endphase dieses Zeitalters aus der Sicht eines

Mannes, der sich ebenfalls am Ende seines Lebens befindet,"[19] a fitting reflection that mirrors current debates surrounding the end of the Holocene era and beginning of the Anthropocene (359). Bernhard Malkmus reads the novella as "a cryptogram of the complex and paradoxical human condition in the Anthropocene" ("Man" 74), but his reading does not sufficiently take into account the narrative dimensions of the nonhuman, material world that seem to greatly interest Frisch. Other contemporary ecocritical analyses offer insightful perspectives on the representation of humans' relation with nonhuman nature in the novella, and the following interpretation should add to those by considering the novella through the lens of material ecocriticism.[20]

Mortality, Glaciers and Rain: Perspectives from Material Ecocriticism

Frisch presents nonhuman nature as a material agent in the novella and Herr Geiser acknowledges the dynamism and potential of great changes in his material surroundings, partly as a result of his focus on the geologic past and the expansive nonhuman changes that occurred then. This reflects careful attention to the nonhuman world on behalf of Frisch and hints that Frisch anticipates the kinds of contemporary environmental thinking familiar to readers today, especially reflections on the relationship between humans and nonhumans that scholars of material ecocriticism bring to light. One such scholar, Stacy Alaimo, focuses on the body as the site at which to trace the various material flows that make up the world. Her theory of trans-corporeality underscores that humans are "perceptually interconnected with the flows of substances

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[19] "the first signs of the incipient final stage of this era from the perspective of a man who also finds himself at the end of his life."
[20] For additional ecocritical perspectives see Dürbeck, Malkmus "Man" and Obschlager "Man."

and the agencies of environments" (Alaimo "Oceanic" 187). Focusing on the body as one site of material flows provides an entry point to examining material elements of the novella.

There are two competing threats in the novella that put Herr Geiser's life at risk and both can be understood as the results of material flows. The first is the threat of his declining health and of the dementia and memory loss specifically that affect him acutely. The other is the threat of natural disaster, of a landslide caused by the nonstop rain, or of a portion of the slope falling off. Frisch combines both threats in the novella, hinting at one while focusing on the other and often blurs the lines between the two; the cracks Herr Geiser intensely monitors in the rock face from fear of a landslide mirror the cracks in his memory and cognitive state. An attempt to mitigate either threat denies or ignores the dynamic systems of both the human body and the forces that comprise the nonhuman environment. I will examine each threat through the lens of material ecocriticism, approaching the body as a site of material flows and showing how Herr Geiser's body is intertwined with the material forces around him. Examining the material agencies that pose a threat to Herr Geiser in the form of a landslide leads me to examine other nonhuman agencies in the novella. Similarly, the threat of cognitive decline serves as a starting point to consider the many ways in which the human body is entangled with material agencies.

His fear of a landslide or other natural disaster is partly rooted in his direct experiences in the outdoors and partly in his examination of the history of similar disasters in the region. Both of these elements combine in Herr Geiser's mind to form a significant, physical threat to his life. Clippings from history books that appear in the

novella reinforce his fear of rockslides. One such clipping written in Gothic script documents a rock avalanche from 1512 that buried houses and their occupants "ganz unerwartet"[21] on one side of the mountain. On the other side of the mountain, "[gingen] andre gewaltige Erdmassen nieder und [verschütteten] das Dorf Campo Bargigno in der Val Calanca"[22] (22). A long-time and avid mountaineer, Herr Geiser recognizes the destructive potential in his surroundings and has a deep-rooted understanding of how small actions can snowball into ones with large consequences, which broadly encompasses both threats.

In one passage of fluid prose, Herr Geiser recalls a near-fatal experience while summiting the Matterhorn with his older brother Klaus over 50 years ago in which Herr Geiser's survival is directly connected to nonhuman, material changes. On their way to the summit, they passed another group led by a mountain guide who, at the top, informed them that they had caused some stones to start to fall while passing the guide and his group, meaning that the two had caused a small rockslide (131). Later, during their descent, the brothers become stranded on a mountain face without any protection. Klaus ultimately makes his way to a safe spot and can secure their ropes to continue their descent safely. Their survival on this day was directly related to the material conditions of the mountain and glacial snow. Klaus had to make his way to a patch of firn so that he could use it as a secure resting point in order to collect the rope from Herr Geiser and then climb up to another ridge and lower the rope down. Firn is a type of granular snow

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[21] "without warning" (13), literally "completely unexpectedly."
[22] "huge masses of earth slid down and engulfed the village of Campo Bargigno in Val Calanca" (13), literally "other violent masses of earth."

that forms as snow transitions into glacial ice and had the snow pack been in a different state, too hard or too soft because of changing temperatures and exposure to the sun over time, Klaus would not have been able to secure his ice pick ("Firn"). In recounting this memory, the specific, material conditions of the snow play a central role: "Der Firn… war aber, obschon seit einer halben Stunde nicht mehr in der Sonne, noch einigermaßen weich; ein Stapfen war möglich"[23] (*Holozän* 134). Had Klaus tried to secure his pick in the firn earlier, the sun's exposure might have made it too soft. And had it been later, the firn could have been frozen solid, which would have also meant that Klaus would not have been able to stamp the ice with his pick. This memory frames the nonhuman environment as a dynamic entity full of factors that change over time and shows how humans are intertwined in these processes, at times with their mortality at stake.

Glaciers, similar to firn, are a central motif in the novella that demonstrate the agency of the nonhuman world; as a nonhuman physical force, they shape the landscape by carving out features or melting to flood certain areas. Symbolically, they represent the scale of geologic change often unnoticed by humans. Herr Geiser's interest in glaciers stems from his recognition of them as a force capable of producing extreme change. Fearing that such nonhuman forces could cause his village to be buried in a landslide, Herr Geiser researches glaciers and other "*Geologische Formationen*"[24] in his encyclopedia and reference works (49). These entries give matter-of-fact descriptions of glaciers that highlight their power as a material force in forming landscapes. From the

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[23] "The packed snow…was, however, still fairly soft, though the sun had been off it for half an hour; it was possible to stamp it" (103).
[24] "Geological formations" (35).

perspective of material ecocriticism, the nonfiction clippings are especially of interest because they offer a perspective on matter's meaning making from outside the context of narrative fiction (yet embedded within a fictitious text). The language used to describe the movements and effects of glaciers emphasizes their role as a dynamic force and presents an unembellished account of storied matter, in this case from an encyclopedia entry on the Alps: "Die Gletscher der Eiszeit haben dieses an den Kämmen und in den Tälern gestufte Gebirge nach neuen Gesetzen umgestaltet. In oberen Enden der Täler, Schluchten, Nischen und Dolinen haben sich vielfach Kare als Wannen eingefressen und die schon zu Graten gewandelten Kämme noch mehr zugeschärft"[25] (49). In this scientific description of glaciers shaping the landscape, the glaciers and masses of ice are clearly the primary agentic force; the subject of each sentence is a nonhuman entity. The glaciers of the ice age reshaped (*umgestalten*) valleys and mountains and did so "nach neuen Gesetzen,"[26] signaling a new horizon unknown to humans. The verb *einfressen* (literally to eat into), moreover, emphasizes the impact of the glaciers; it means "gewaltsam tief in etw. eindringen"[27] ("einfressen"). As the entry continues, it describes the traces left by glacial movement: "Im einzelnen zeigen die [Alpen] vielerorts die allen einst vergletscherten Gebirgen eigenen Spuren der nicht nur schleifenden und

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[25] "The glaciers of the Ice Age transformed these mountain ranges by acting on peaks and valleys according to new principles. Ravines, niches, sinkholes, cirques (basinlike hollows) were carved out at the head of the valleys, and the peaks, already shaped into ridges, sharpened still further" (36).
[26] "according to new principles"
[27] "to penetrate forcefully into something"

polierenden, sondern auch splitternden und brechenden glazialen Erosion…"[28] (49). Once again, the glaciers are attributed the agency of grinding, polishing, splintering and crushing.

Strikingly, glaciers do not only leave traces of their material forces in the past by carving out rivers and moraines; they remain as material agents of change, still slowly moving and shaping landscapes, and also melting at a much faster rate and threatening coastal regions with sea-level rise. In contrast to the straightforward, objective information provided by the reference works, Herr Geiser is unnerved about the threats posed by the geologic formations around him and his trepidation plays out in observations that are repeated in the novella in similar formulations and therefore add to the threat. The glaciers in the area, for example, are framed as being in a process of movement: "Die Gletscher, die sich einmal bis Mailand erstreckt haben, sind überall im Rückzug…"[29] (57). A similar comment follows later: "Die Gletscher befinden sich seit Jahrhunderten im Rückzug"[30] (63). In both remarks, the present tense emphasizes the agency of the nonhuman material entity. Their movement is not an event contained in past; it is occurring in the present and its effects extend into the future.

This "potential energy" of glaciers is another threat Herr Geiser identifies repeatedly in similar formulations. Recalling glaciers in Iceland, the latent threat is

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[28] "In many parts of the Alps individual mountains, all of them once covered with glaciers, reveal traces, not only of the grinding and polishing effect of glaciers, but also of erosion…" (36).
[29] "The glaciers, which once stretched as far as Milan, are now in retreat everywhere…" (42).
[30] "The glaciers have been retreating for centuries" (47).

described as, “Wenn das Eis der Arktis schmilzt, so ist New York unter Wasser”[31] (70). Later, then, in a list of facts that Herr Geiser focuses on to pass the time, the threat of sea level rise is mentioned again, “—wenn das Eis der Arktis schmilzt, so ist New York unter Wasser, desgleichen Europa, ausgenommen die Alpen”[32] (103). Finally, a hand-written note that appears as an image in the novella mentions changing sea level: “Am Ende der Eiszeit lag der Meeresspiegel mindestens 100 Meter tiefer”[33] (34). In all of these examples, the amount and size of ice and glaciers and the sea level are not presented as static conditions. Rather, Frisch emphasizes that the surrounding nonhuman environment is always in flux and connects sea level rise with melting glaciers, indicating the threat this poses to human life.

A twenty-first century reader would quickly associate these comments on melting glaciers and sea level rise with anthropogenic climate change. Frisch, however, doesn’t identify an anthropogenic cause of melting glaciers, but the possibility of New York being underwater nevertheless implies a future unfit for humans. Without a clear anthropogenic basis, Frisch still acknowledges glaciers as a force and this important framing aligns with views in material ecocriticism by showing glaciers as part of the “field of distributed agency” that humans share with “countless other actors” (Iovino and Oppermann “Theorizing” 451). Therefore, Frisch seems to anticipate both environmental issues of the 21st century and narrative strategies fit for addressing them. Frisch

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[31] “If the Arctic ice were to melt, New York would be under water” (52).
[32] “—if the Arctic ice were to melt, New York would be under water, as would Europe, except for the Alps” (79).
[33] “At the end of the Ice Age the level of the sea was at least 100 meters lower than today” (24).

comments on the process of erosion in a similar way as with the glaciers, highlighting the potential for destruction to humans. In contrast to Herr Geiser, who fears a landslide form the storm, the other inhabitants are not troubled by it: "Die Burschen haben ihren lauten Spaß; die Erosion, die draußen stattfindet, bekümmert sie überhaupt nicht"[34] (44). A handwritten note that follows this comment details an example of erosion in a nearby town caused by river from 1890 to 1926 (44). As if to calm Herr Geiser's fears of a landslide, a single line serves as a reminder of the speed of erosion: "Erosion ist ein langsamer Vorgang"[35] (64). The word *Vorgang*, which means a type of event or process, frames erosion as complex process ("Vorgang").[36]

In the case of the moving glaciers, Malkmus remarks that "[t]he role of anthropogenic forces in this scenario is not fully spelled out, but it is clear from how Frisch interweaves the motifs of biodiversity loss, invasive species, and climate change that these forces are growing at an accelerated speed and will constitute a major global concern in the future" (82), though I think it is justified to suggest that Frisch does not frame these environmental issues as a future problem. Rather, the geologic time scale means that Frisch's perspective is an expansive one in which it is clear that all actions in the present will have a lasting effect. By framing the novella on a geologic time scale and highlighting events of the deep past, nonhuman nature's agentic capacity becomes visible to the reader. The threat of a landslide that Herr Geiser fears is well founded in his understanding of matter's capacity to produce change.

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[34] "The youngsters are loud in their enjoyment; the erosion going on outside does not worry them in the least" (31).
[35] "Erosion is a slow process" (48).
[36] Cf. Handke's focus on meandering rivers and the role erosion plays in that process.

Another way in which Frisch articulates the agentic capacity of nonhuman nature is through his focus on rain. In his essay "When *it* Rains," Lowell Duckert asks what interpretive possibilities are opened when rain is taken as an agent or force in its own right. Following Jane Bennett's call for a vibrant materialism and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, Duckert asks what happens when the *it* of "it is raining" is considered seriously and what new relationships (and embodiments) are brought into being when *it* rains (115).[37] His questions are extremely relevant to literary analyses of material forces, as they open up the possibility to see rain, storms, monsoons, snow, and other forms of precipitation as participating in narratives through the entanglements between humans and nonhumans that they engender. Duckert considers the role of rain and monsoons in early modern travelogues, pointing to the analyses of Latour and Michel Serres to highlight a sense of relationality between humans and nonhumans, but his analysis doesn't fully consider the narrative possibilities (that is, what would it look like to tell stories of *it* raining) when he asks "what if we stayed *in* the rain rather than held our egos and our knowledge systems *below* it" (114, original emphasis). Following Duckert's call to take rain as an agent in its own right, this section considers the narrative and interpretive dimensions that open up in the novella when rain is taken seriously.

In *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, the reader encounters an example of rain that is very much entwined with the story's narrative and one that allows rain to be considered as a narrative agent.[38] In fact, rain creates the very conditions for the novella;

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[37] See Latour's *Reassembling the Social* and Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

[38] This is of special interest because, as previously stated, *Regen* (Rain) was one of two tentative titles for the work (Kilcher 114).

the days of nonstop rain have caused the road closures that isolate Herr Geiser in his village and eventually drive him to attempt to hike out of the valley. In Duckert's analysis, rain "*precipitates* in the literal sense," and Duckert looks to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of precipitation to show that "it actively 'throws' things 'headlong' and 'causes' things 'to happen'" (116, original emphasis). Well before Herr Geiser sets off on his attempted hike out of the village, his backpack is packed and ready, yet he delays his departure because he knows that the path would be blocked by streams overflowing from the intense rain. The rain and floods prevent him from taking off sooner: "Auch der alte Saumpfad hinunter ins Tal, den Herr Geiser vor vielen Jahren einmal begangen hat, dürfte zurzeit von Bächen mit Geschiebe unterbrochen sein, lebensgefährlich, das braucht Herr Geiser sich von niemand sagen zu lassen"[39] (24-25). When he does attempt the hike, the streams that flood the path disorient him, transforming the route and landscape into unrecognizable obstacles. The heavy fog also hides elements in the landscape, meaning that Herr Geiser cannot recall if he has already passed across the small brook that would help him determine his location (91). The same confusion happens with another stream of water that Herr Geiser cannot determine as the one marked on his map or as the result of the heavy rain: "Ein Bach ohne Brücke, eigentlich kein Bach, sondern ein Gewässer, das es nur nach langen Unwetter gibt und

[39] "Even the old mule track down in the valley, which Geiser once followed years ago, would probably be blocked now by streams full of debris, a perilous path—he does not need anyone to tell him that" (15).

das auf der Karte verzeichnet ist"[40] (94-95). The rain and its effects disorient Herr Geiser and weaken his mental and physical condition.

Moreover, rain and weather are known to cause living creatures to behave in unexpected ways and it becomes clear how the threat to Herr Geiser's cognitive condition—the second large threat framing the novel—is also at stake. This phenomenon is described in a clipping from an encyclopedia that appears toward the end of the novella as Herr Geiser's condition worsens. It states that "Die *Lebensvorgänge* im menschl. und tier. Organismus werden durch [Gewitter] insofern beeinflußt, als die Labilisierung der Wetterlage (→Wetter) eine erhöhte Erregbarkeit des vegetativen Nervensystems bewirkt"[41] (114). Bodies of humans and nonhuman animals are brought into a reciprocal relationship with weather systems in a manner that aligns with Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality, which "not only traces how various substances travel across and within the human body but how they *do* things—often unwelcome or unexpected things" (*Bodily* 146; original emphasis). The encyclopedia clipping continues, listing consequences of the effects (the unwelcome or unexpected things) of weather on humans, including changes in the circulatory system and blood clots: "Auch Embolien können sich an Tagen mit [Gewitter] häufen"[42] (114). Later, the clipping of the encyclopedia entry on strokes explains that similar symptoms can be caused by embolisms: "Auch plötzlich

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[40] "An unbridged stream—not a proper stream, but a stretch of flowing water that is just the result of persistent rain and is not marked on the map" (73).
[41] "The vital functions of human beings and animals are influenced by thunderstorms to the extent that unstable weather conditions (*see* Weather) exacerbate the responses of the sympathetic nervous system" (87).
[42] "embolisms can occur more frequently on days when the atmosphere is thundery" (87).

Verstopfungen von Blutadern (*Embolie*) können ähnliche Symptome hervorrufen"[43] (141). Rain and storms, like the ones that plague Herr Geiser's valley, can cause changes in humans' blood circulation, potentially leading to a stroke. These extremely significant pieces of information and their connection could easily be passed over if the reader does not carefully consider each clipping. Their constellation in the text hint at the entanglement of Herr Geiser with his material surroundings and the striking possibility that his stroke could be the result of the weather, exemplifying key claims of material ecocriticism.

In his analysis, Duckert focuses on Serres's comments that the words for weather and time are the same in French—*le temps* (Duckert 121). The same holds true for Italian, the language spoken in Herr Geiser's village—the words for time and weather are both *il tempo*. When the narrator reports on the people's reaction in the village after the storm, his remark on what they say stands out in a single line that is repeated twice "CHE TEMPO, CHE TEMPO!" (*Holozän* 73). The expression can be translated to mean both "what weather!" and "what time!" Weather and time become increasingly connected in the novella as Frisch subtly juxtaposes the various ways of telling time, contrasting "human" time (of clocks and routines) with nonhuman, natural time. Without electricity and cut off from his usual methods of telling time, Herr Geiser turns instead to looking for signs of time's passing in the nonhuman world. The village clock tower, which usually "schlägt die Stunde zweifach für den Fall, daß jemand nicht genau gezählt hat"[44]

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[43] "Another cause of the loss of brain function is the blocking of a cerebral blood vessel, preventing blood from reaching the brain (*embolism*)" (109).
[44] "The church clock strikes each hour twice, in case one has neglected to count properly" (110).

(142), remains still during the storm. This detail is mentioned twice in the novella; it makes obvious Herr Geiser's reliance on clock time and provides an example of the potential of nonhuman forces to interfere with clock time (32; 43).

Il tempo, time and weather, come together in one of the logbook-like passages of phenological observations in the text in which Herr Geiser measures the passing of time according to the rain.[45] Time ostensibly passes, marked by varying states and types of rain:

> Sonntag:
> 10.00
> Regen wie Spinnweben über dem Gelände.
> 10.40
> Regen als Perlen an der Scheibe.
> […]
> 11.50
> kein Regen.
> 13.00
> Regen, der nicht zu sehen ist, man spürt ihn bloß auf der Haut, wenn man die Hand aus dem Fenster streckt.[46] (54-55)

On one level, this logbook represents Herr Geiser's desperate attempt to keep track of time and assure himself that it is passing, and his encyclopedia-like categorizations connect him to the knowledge he fears is lost. On another level, however, the logbook presents a profound material-temporal narrative of the *it* in "it rains." The varied descriptions record the many different types of rain and determining the differences

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[45] This is one example of a number of similar lists. Herr Geiser also categorizes types of thunder to pass the time (11-13; 35-36) or takes an inventory of the provisions he has in his house (15). There are all examples that can be connected to one of the nonfiction works in Herr Geiser's collection, the logbook from Robert Scott, the polar explorer.
[46] "Sunday: / 10:00 A.M. / Rain as cobwebs over the grounds. / 10:40 A.M. / Rain as pearls on the windowpane. / […] 11:50 A.M. / No rain. / 1:00 P.M. / Rain invisible to the eye, but, stretching a hand out of the window, one feels it on one's skin" (41).

between them hinges on human perception. As Duckert explains in his analysis, rain "reminds us that there are only things in relations and *as* relations, beings in cascade with everywhere to fall" (120). Similarly, Herr Geiser registers the relations through the sights, sounds, and feeling of rain, distinguishing between them and thereby registering the passing of time. At 13.00, when he cannot see whether it is raining, he sticks his hand out the window to feel it, entangling the body in the relations of rain. The absence of rain is also meaningful, which is noted with "kein Regen"[47] at 11:50 (*Holozän* 55).

Although Herr Geiser fears heavy rain and the potential of a landslide, he is reassured by changes in the nonhuman environment because they convince him that time is passing. Moreover, objective measurements of clock time create a backdrop against which his lapses in memory play out. For example, in a passage that exemplifies the narrator's slight mocking of Herr Geiser, he expresses doubt about his watch functioning rather than accept that he is losing track of time and forgetting large parts of his day. Between passages that describe Herr Geiser taking down the portrait of his late wife and trying to find a suitable place for it, a remark occupies a single line, "Vermutlich ist die Armbanduhr stehengeblieben"[48] (86). Instead of acknowledging that Herr Geiser has lost track of time, the narrator places blame on the watch. The adjective *vermutlich* (presumably) signals an observation based on a subjective experience rather than an objective reality, implying that Herr Geiser has become disconnected from reality (the etymology of the root word *Mut* connects it to the realm of feelings rather than reason and it shares the same root as the English 'mood'). The comment also highlights the

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[47] "No rain" (41).
[48] "Presumably his watch has stopped" (66).

complexity of the narrator because the word *vermutlich* is connected to Herr Geiser's subjective experience.

Once again, the narrator inserts subjective remarks into the narration, commenting on Herr Geiser's growing desperation, "Wieder und wieder auf die Armbanduhr zu blicken, um sich zu überzeugen, daß die Zeit vergeht, ist Unsinn. Die Zeit ist noch nie stehengeblieben, bloß weil ein Mensch sich langweilt und am Fenster steht und nicht weiß, was er denkt"[49] (85). The narrator describes Herr Geiser's actions—the repeated checking of the time on his watch—with subjective tint, calling it nonsense. Losing track of time further signals Herr Geiser's worsening issues with his memory and his increasingly vulnerable state. The narrator's subtly subjective commentary adds to Herr Geiser's doubt. In the first few pages of the novella, for example, Herr Geiser is confused about the day of the week. A single line states that "Heute ist Mittwoch"[50] (17). This is immediately followed by another single line with a parenthetical remark: "(Oder Donnerstag?)"[51] (17). While it is unclear if the parenthetical remark is the narrator's commentary or Herr Geiser's doubt, the end result remains the same and Herr Geiser's uncertainty about time is revealed. Later, Herr Geiser stops by the local tavern ostensibly to pick up matches, though it becomes clear that he was also looking to find out what day it was in hopes of confirming his mental stability: "…Streichhölzer sind auch in der Pinte zu bekommen; man braucht sich nicht zu setzen, um einen Schnaps zu kippen und dann,

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[49] "To keep looking at one's wristwatch, just in order to convince oneself that time is passing, is absurd. Time has never yet stood still just because a person is bored and stands at the window, not knowing what he is thinking" (66).
[50] "Today is Wednesday" (9).
[51] "(Or Thursday?)" (9).

während man bezahlt, beiläufig nach dem Wochentag zu fragen"[52] (43). The friendliness of the owner clues him in that it is Saturday, "Nur das hat Herr Geiser wissen wollen"[53] (43). His trip to the tavern and conversation with the owner also suggests Herr Geiser's embarrassment about his cognition issues because he does not simply ask for the day of the week.

Four Temporalities

The focus on rain also functions to illustrate a central finding of the novella and of geology—that small changes over time can add up to have a much larger effect. This is the case across the four different temporalities presented in the novel: geologic or deep time, individual human time, collective human time and a temporality beyond the human. Changes in geologic history move at a pace and on a time scale both so greatly different from the other two that it can be difficult for humans to comprehend and can accordingly mask the changes that are indeed taking place. For Herr Geiser personally, each instance of forgetting a fact or doubting his knowledge signals his overall worsening condition. For collective human history, small actions prove to have larger, sometimes devastating effects. Finally, Frisch hints at a fourth temporality—one that extends beyond the human.

In his analysis of the power of nature in the novella, Malcolm Pender remarks on how the layers of time are presented in the novella and the effect of the focus on geologic time in particular:

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[52] "…matches can also be bought in the tavern; no need to sit down to swallow a quick schnapps and then, while paying, to ask casually what day it is" (31), literally "one doesn't even need to sit down in order to swallow a quick schnapps and then…".
[53] "That is all Geiser wished to know" (31).

> ‘Geologisches’ hat während des Unwetters den Blick von Herrn Geiser auf die Dimensionen der Erdenzeit gerichtet—er begreift, wie kurz der Aufenthalt des Menschen im Verhältnis zur unermesslichen Länge der Erdgeschichte ist und auch, dass die unumkehrbare Eigengesetzlichkeit der Naturgesetze bei der Ankunft des Menschen schon bestand und nach seinem möglichen Aussterben auch weiterbestehen wird.[54] (Pender 49)

Though geologic formations appear static, they are part of a vibrant, ever-changing process of nature that has existed before and will potentially persist beyond mankind—a reality that is accentuated repeatedly by the juxtaposition of geologic time with Herr Geiser’s individual life. In an analysis of time and space in Frisch’s novella, Rémy Charbon notes how the inconceivable dimensions of geologic history are intensified by Herr Geiser’s fixed location in the Onsernone valley: “Es ‘vertieft’ im Wortsinn den Raum, setzt Herrn Geiser in Relation zu den unvorstellbaren Dimensionen der Erdgeschichte und macht (vorerst dem Leser) die schwindelerregende Staffelung der Zeitschichten bewusst”[55] (20). Apart from Herr Geiser’s one failed attempt to leave the valley, other locations are only described indirectly through the incorporation of

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[54] “The ‘geological’ focused Herr Geiser on the dimensions of the earth’s time during the storm—he grasps how short human’s inhabitance is in relation to the immeasurable extent of geologic history and also that the irreversible autonomy of the laws of nature already existed upon the arrival of humans and will persist beyond humans’ possible extinction.”

[55] “It ‘deepens,’ in the literal sense, the space, places Herr Geiser in relation to the unimaginable dimensions of geologic history and makes the dizzying scale of the layers of time known (for now, to the reader).”

fragments from the reference books or in Herr Geiser's memories of his previous travels.[56]

An example that illustrates multiple temporalities at play at the same time occurs as his memory becomes more unreliable and Herr Geiser distrusts human ways of telling time. He turns away from his watch that still functions during the storm and instead to signs of time's passing in the material world. The following passage evokes the multiple temporalities at play in the novella: "Als Herr Geiser wieder zum Fenster geht, um an den langsam gleitenden Tropfen zu sehen, daß die Zeit nicht stehen bleibt – das hat es in der ganzen Erdgeschichte nie gegeben! – und als er es nicht lassen kann und nochmals auf seine Armbanduhr schaut, zeigt sie sieben Minuten nach sechs"[57] (87). His watch, as a sign of human progress and the regulated human schedule, symbolizes collective human time. It also evokes individual, biological time by reminding the reader of Herr Geiser's ticking biological clock and declining health. The raindrop indicates the immediate present, but the interjection "das hat es in der ganzen Erdgeschichte nie gegeben!" places the passing of time in the much larger history of the earth. Moreover, the interjection serves to reveal Herr Geiser's cognitive decline with a slight mocking tone; if time has never stood still since the origins of the earth, only an aging fool would think it would stand still in the present. These moments in the absence of "human" time do not assuage

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[56] Moreover, his spatial isolation contrasts noticeably with the protagonists in Frisch's earlier works, like Walter Faber in *Homo Faber* who travels from New York to South America by faulty plane, across the Atlantic by ship and from Paris to Athens by car.
[57] "When Geiser goes back to the window to convince himself, by watching the slowly gliding raindrops, that time is not standing still—and in the whole of history it has never done that!—and when he cannot resist looking at his watch again, it reads seven minutes past six" (67).

Herr Geiser by tricking him into thinking that time could stand still and that he could stop aging. Instead, the material changes around him affirm that time is passing.[58] The novella's four temporal dimensions appear in distinct ways and are often entangled. Together, they open new narrative dimensions that extend beyond traditional narratives focused on a single human life and hint at nonhuman temporalities.

Geologic Time

The scale of geologic time, as the most expansive temporality in the novella, is pervasive throughout the book through Herr Geiser's focus on the geologic formations around him and his acknowledgement of the multitude of forces that make up the landscape. The origin of these geologic features interests Herr Geiser greatly. In part, his search for origins is driven by his memory loss and he attempts to reconstruct knowledge he once had. However, it is his fear of a landslide or other natural disaster that leads him to search for the specific geologic knowledge he has forgotten. Following clippings that detail the history of flooding in the region, the narrator remarks on Herr Geiser's knowledge of natural processes,[59] stating "Wie Flut und Ebbe entstehen, wie Vulkane, wie Gebirge usw., hat Herr Geiser einmal gewußt"[60] (27). From a material ecocriticism perspective, what stands out here is the verb *entstehen*, which means to come into existence or to develop. This formulation is a recognition of nonhuman nature as a process, as an entity made up of a number of forces. Moreover, the verb *entstehen* is in

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[58] Knapp provides a detailed discussion of time's existential function in Frisch's *Homo Faber*.
[59] The high and low tides mentioned here evoke another temporal dimension of 24-hour times cycles.
[60] "Geiser knew at one time what caused tides, just as he knew about volcanoes, mountain ranges, etc." (18).

the present tense rather than the past, signaling that these processes are still at work in the present. Change that produces mountain ranges and volcanoes is only comprehensible on a massive scale and Frisch includes this perspective of geologic time.[61]

Herr Geiser's concern with cracks and fissures in the rock face mirror cracks in his cognition and memory, blurring the boundaries between Herr Geiser's individual time and deep time. Avalanches and landslides fittingly illustrate the potential for Herr Geiser's health to take a sudden turn toward collapse. Looking for signs of potential weak spots around him illustrates how small actions transform into larger, more threatening ones: "Bedenklicher als der Einsturz einer Trockenmauer wäre ein Riß durchs Gelände, ein vorerst schmaler Riß, handbreit, aber ein Riß—"[62] (45). He is more concerned about a fissure in the rock face as sign of potential destruction than the collapse of a manmade retaining wall. The destruction of the manmade wall would likely cause significant damage, but Geiser intuitively fears destruction on a larger scale.

A parenthetical remark immediately follows and explains why a single fissure is so meaningful, "(So fangen Erdrutsche an, wobei solche Risse lautlos entstehen und sich Wochen lang nicht erweitern oder kaum, bis plötzlich, wenn man nichts erwartet, der ganze Hang unterhalb des Risses rutscht und auch Wälder mit sich reißt und alles, was

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[61] When Herr Geiser recalls his trip to Iceland, he takes note of the volcanoes in the area, and one in particular that had recently formed using the past tense form of *entstehen*: "Ein anderer Vulkan, ein neuer, ist im Meer entstanden, ein Insel aus Asche und Basalt…" (71), ("Another volcano, a new one, has risen from the sea, an island of ash and basalt" (52)).

[62] "More serious than the collapse of a dry-stone wall would be a crack across the grounds, narrow at first, no broader than a hand, but a crack—" (32).

nicht Grundfels ist)"[63] (45). This remark that could otherwise seem objective becomes incredibly threatening in combination with its position in relation to Herr Geiser's cognitive condition. The beginnings of the *Erdrutsch* (landslide) are *lautlos*—without a sound—and hard to detect until, suddenly and unexpectedly, the entire slope collapses. After a fissure appears, the remark continues, it can remain the same size for weeks before any change occurs. The time marker of weeks seems out of place in the sentence that refers to geologic formations that have existed for millennia, blurring the lines between Herr Geiser's condition and geologic processes. The *Riß* (fissure, crack), symbolizes the destructive possibility in both the natural formations around him and in his existence, which is why he feverishly examines the rock faces for cracks, using binoculars to check for changes. Additionally, the abrupt end to his remarks and the dash that signals an interruption mid-thought exemplifies the sudden changes that occur in a landslide. While examining the rock face, Herr Geiser sees "Flühe, stur wie eh und je—"[64] (46). *Fluh* is the Swiss-German word for a rock face (*Felswand*) and its description as stubborn signals a state of eternal existence that stands in contrast to the following lines and the encyclopedia clippings that note how such mountains were formed. The word *stur* (stubborn) is usually used to refer to people (a fitting description for Herr Geiser)

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[63] "(That is the way landslides begin, cracks appearing noiselessly, not widening, or hardly at all, for weeks on end, until suddenly, when one is least expecting it, the whole slope below the crack begins to slide, carrying even forests and all else that is not firm rock down with it)" (33).

[64] "Walls of rock, stubborn as ever and always—" (33).

rather than mountains, again blurring the lines between Herr Geiser and the landscape. His stubbornness is connected to his unwillingness to admit the cracks in his memory.[65]

Perhaps due to his investigation into the formation of the mountain range and the valley, Herr Geiser sees the mountains around him not as static elements, but as elements with origins and developments in their own right. After an hour of close examination, he determines by studying the color of the rocks that the fissures in the rocks are indeed "aus grauer Vorzeit"[66] and not from the contemporary moment (46). The colors clue Herr Geiser to the time because "Bruchstellen aus der Gegenwart wären heller, grau und nicht verfärbt wie die ganze Fluh"[67] (47). Once again, the passing of time is connected to material changes; it is marked on the rocks by the different colors. One of the next clippings, from an encyclopedia, details "*Geologische Formationen*" (*Geological Formations*) and how layers from fossilized plants and animals form and make up different stratigraphic strata (49). Another encyclopedia clipping explains how the movement of glaciers transformed the alpine regions, creating river valleys and ridges (49).

While looking for cracks, the highest arête of the mountain face is hidden in the clouds, but Herr Geiser knows it from previous careful study: "Der Grat, der oberste, ist allerdings in Wolken; Herr Geiser kennt ihn aber auswendig: es ist ein scharfer Grat ohne Trümmer, zackig seit Jahrtausenden, Gebirge, das die Gletscher der Eiszeit überragt hat,

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[65] Walter Obschlager traces the trope of the *Riß* throughout Frisch's work. For more, see Obschlager "Risse."
[66] "from gray, prehistoric ages" (33).
[67] "Recent fractures would be lighter in color, gray and not faded like the whole rock face" (34).

ein zuverlässiges Gestein"[68] (47). Despite not being able to view it, Herr Geiser deems the high mountain ridge reliable because of its lack of debris and its existence since millennia. Once again, Herr Geiser turns to signs in the material realm to confirm the passing of time. He deems the fissure that he does spot in the rock face as non-threatening because of trees that grow in it: "Ein riesenhaften Riß in dem Fels, der hinter dem Dorf fast senkrecht in die grauen Wolken steht, ist nicht von heute oder gestern; es wachsen Tannen drin"[69] (46). The fissure's origins in the deep past, marked by material elements (its color and presence of trees), assures him that the crack does not pose a threat of a rockslide while also creating a juxtaposition between the time scales of the existence of the mountain and Herr Geiser's life.

Thinking about the origins of geologic formations and of mankind also leads Geiser to investigate the different geologic epochs, "Trias, Jura, Kreide usw., keine Ahnung, wie viele Jahrmillionen die einzelnen Erdzeitalter gedauert haben"[70] (28). Herr Geiser looks up this information in the reference books, but soon forgets it, "Es genügt nicht, daß Herr Geiser in diesem oder jenem Buch mit seinem Kugelschreiber anstreicht, was wissenswert ist; schon eine Stunde später erinnert man sich nur noch ungenau… Herr Geiser muß es eigenhändig auf einen Zettel schreiben, was er nicht vergessen will,

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[68] The ridge, the highest point, is admittedly hidden in the clouds; but Geiser knows it by heart: it is a sharp ridge free of loose debris, jagged for countless millennia, mountains that towered above the glaciers of the Ice Age, a trustworthy stone" (34).
[69] "A huge crack in the cliff behind the village, rising almost vertically up to the gray clouds, is from neither yesterday nor today; there are fir trees growing in it" (33).
[70] "Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, etc., but no idea how many millions of years the various eras lasted" (18).

und die Zettel an die Wand heften…"[71] (28). Besides a diagram of the golden ratio, the first handwritten note in the text is a list of the geologic periods from the Cambium to the Quaternary ranging from 1 to 100 million years.[72] Arranged into an orderly list in this way, the geologic timescale appears comprehensible (see Image 1 in Appendix).

A further aspect of geologic time dimensions is the trope of amphibians and dinosaurs that runs throughout the novella and that functions to place the life span of Herr Geiser and humans in general into a much larger perspective. Herr Geiser's investigation into dinosaurs and amphibians is originally sparked by an alpine fire salamander that appears in his bathroom. At first, the salamander appears to exemplify a type of trickster figure; when Herr Geiser believes it to be in the bathroom, it suddenly appears in the living room. In reality, Herr Geiser's weakened memory causes him to lose track of time and forget where he just was. Since the salamander is a reminder of his declining health, Herr Geiser eventually throws it into the fireplace to kill it (124).[73] What begins as an investigation into the salamander and amphibians in general eventually expands to include dinosaurs. Amphibians and dinosaurs function as a background against which the

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[71] "It is not enough for Geiser to draw a line with his ballpoint pen against passages in this book or that worth remembering; within an hour his memory of them has become hazy… the things he does not wish to forget Geiser must write down in his own hand on pieces of paper, which he must then affix to the wall…" (19).
[72] The list confuses scale a number of times, switching from geologic periods to eras.
[73] The treatment of animals in the text deserves further consideration. In addition to burning the salamander, Herr Geiser also tries to cook his cat in the chimney (125). These instances of violence against animals are presented in a similar way to the rest of the choppy narrative and in very matter-of-fact plainness. Especially in the example of the cat, it is clear that Herr Geiser was not entirely cognizant of what he was doing at the time. Moreover, the novella includes a passage from the Bible that describes how God created animals and Adam named them (113). Finally, the last sentence of the text describes how a tawny owl can sometimes be heard in the valley (143).

narrator compares and contrasts Herr Geiser because they provide an evolutionary narrative that both represents the progressive evolution of species and presents the immense scale of geologic time in a way that is familiar to readers. Of course, extinction also figures heavily into the trope of dinosaurs and looms over Herr Geiser who, like the dinosaurs, faces the threat of extinction by natural disaster. The many images of dinosaurs in the clippings that appear toward the end of the text are skeletal reconstructions made from bones and fossils dug up from a buried past. As Virginia Zimmer eloquently describes in her book *Excavating Victorians*, fossils are metonyms for the deep past and "traces signifying absence as much as they assert their own presence" (40). That is, geologists come to understand deep time through material remains of the past that themselves are often derived from deeper pasts. The comparison of dinosaurs and humans suggests that humans, including Herr Geiser, will likely also be fossils one day.[74] As Stobbe also notes, "So wie bei den Sauriern nur noch Lurche an deren Verschwinden mit dem Beginn eines neuen Erdzeitalters erinnern, deutet sich hinsichtlich des Menschen ein ähnliches Schicksal an"[75] (370).

Frisch's juxtaposition of humans—specifically Herr Geiser—with dinosaurs illustrates the relative insignificance of his life. One clipping in particular shows the

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[74] A book reviewer in *Die Presse* from 1979 also identified the trope of future human fossils in the next: "Er weiß sterbend: auch seine eigenen Knochen werden eines sehr fernen Tages, nach Jahrmillionen, erodieren und versteinern, und so eine Metamorphose eingehen mit der unbewußten Natur des Bodens und der Felsgeschiebe wie weiland die Skelette der Saurier" ("He knows the moribund: one very distant day, after millions of years, his own bones will also erode and fossilize, and undergo such a metamorphosis with the unconscious nature of the soil and the cliff moraine, like the erstwhile skeletons of the dinosaurs") (Klaus).

[75] "Just as amphibians are a reminder of dinosaurs and their vanishing with the beginning of a new era, a similar fate is indicated in regard to humans."

striking contrast visually; an encyclopedia entry compares the size of a human skeleton with that of a Spinosaurus dinosaur (see Image 2 in Appendix).[76] The human skeleton appears tiny next to the dinosaur's that is over nine meters long. Furthermore, the narrator mocks Herr Geiser's cognitive weakness by comparing him to a *Lurch*—an amphibian. As with a number of the narrator's other subjective statements, this comparison appears as a parenthetical remark. For example, a list of Herr Geiser's everyday knowledge (when he was born, his parents' names) is interrupted by "(was ein Lurch alles nicht weiß)"[77] (125). The next line continues, "Herr Geiser ist kein Lurch"[78] (125). The comparison to an amphibian suggests an evolutionary regression to what is considered a lower life form than humans, as well as comparisons to the "reptilian brain" as Herr Geiser's loses higher cognitive functions.[79] A subsequent passage provides a similar juxtaposition: "Herr Geiser weiß, wie er aussieht. / (ein Lurch weiß nicht einmal das)"[80] (127). In her narrative analysis, Eszter Pabis positions both the reader and the protagonist of the novella in a position similar to a paleontologist. She writes that "[b]eide versuchen nämlich, aus den noch vorhandenen Bruchstücken einen Sinn, eine Art imaginative 'Ganzheit' zu (re)konstruieren"[81] (73). Through the clippings, Herr Geiser restores the knowledge he has lost, while the reader must reconstruct his thought process and connect the scattered pieces of the narrative, which often extends into the deep past.

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[76] This image was also reproduced on the cover of the first publication of the novella.
[77] "(The things a newt knows)", lit. "what a newt does not know" (97).
[78] "Geiser is not a newt" (97).
[79] Compare with the encyclopedia clipping on *Mensch* that describes humans as able to conceive of their own subjectivity vis-à-vis others (71).
[80] "Geiser knows what he looks like. / (A newt doesn't even know that)" (99).
[81] "namely, both attempt to (re)construct a meaning, a type of imaginative 'wholeness' from the fragments still available."

Individual Human Time

The individual human time scale in the novella, the second temporality I establish, deals with the span of one human life in the progression from life to death and in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, the single individual of interest is Herr Geiser. His struggles with aging are evident in his worsening physical and cognitive conditions and they signal that he is near death. I will consider the parts of the novel that illuminate elements of Herr Geiser's life. In fact, only a few personal details about Herr Geiser are given via small clues throughout the text, like the mention of his "Dipolm-Urkunde vom Technikum"[82] that hides among items listed as discreetly occupying his junk drawer including receipts and X-rays (76). The reader learns of his late wife Elsbeth, of his brother Klaus and his daughter Corrine who lives in Basel and comes to check on him after his stroke. [83] The majority of the novella focuses on Herr Geiser alone and these family relationships exist primarily in Herr Geiser's memory.

Strikingly, the books in Herr Geiser's collection reveal more about his life than the commentary of the narrator does. A list of books in his collection allows the reader to create a profile of the protagonist:

> das Logbuch von Robert Scott, der am Südpol erfroren ist, hat Herr Geiser mehrmals gelesen, die Bibel schon lang nicht mehr. Was außer dem Lexikon in zwölf Bänden vorhanden ist: Gartenbücher, ein Buch über Schlangen, eine Geschichte des Kantons Tessin, das Schweizerische Lexikon sowie Bilderbücher

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[82] "his polytechnic diploma" (57).
[83] The name Elsbeth is significant for Frisch. In *Homo Faber*, the name of the protagonist's young love interest who is later revealed to be his daughter is named Sabeth. For more on *Homo Faber*, see Bulter *The Novels of Max Frisch*.

> für die Enkelkinder (DIE WELT, IN DER WIR LEBEN), der Fremdwörter-Duden und ein Buch über Island, wo Herr Geiser vor dreißig Jahren einmal gewesen ist, sowie Landkarten der näheren Umgebung und Wanderbücher, die Auskunft geben über Geologisches, Klimatisches, Historisches usw. betreffend die Gegend.[84] (17-18)

From this collection the reader can construct a picture of Herr Geiser as serious professional concerned with facts. His distaste for works of fiction is made clear; as the reader learns, his late wife liked to read novels, but Herr Geiser prefers nonfiction. The Bible that hasn't been read in a long time suggests an abandonment of religious beliefs and the supernatural. The books mentioned also reveal details about his prior trip to Iceland and his interest in the nonhuman, natural world. Many, but not all, of these books are the sources of Herr Geiser's clippings.

In contrast to geologic time which is presented as an expansive, never-ending force, the time span of an individual human life is repeatedly framed as finite. As previously mentioned, the most poignant aspect of the individual human story of the novel is Herr Geiser's struggle with aging and memory loss as the seventy-three-year-old faces his own mortality. The certainty of death, however, calls attention to particular elements. Rudolf Arnheim articulates this phenomenon in his investigation of elements of

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[84] "the diary of Captain Scott, who froze to death at the South Pole—Geiser has read this several times, but it is a very long while since he last read the Bible. Besides the twelve-volume encyclopedia there are: gardening books, a book on snakes, a history of the canton of Ticino, the Swiss encyclopedia, as well as pictures books for the grandchildren (THE WORLD WE LIVE IN), the Duden dictionary of foreign words, and a book about Iceland, which Geiser once visited thirty years ago, as well as maps and rambling guides that provide information about the geology, climate, history, etc., of the district" (10).

time and space in images. He writes that "[t]he more unique a particular object or kind of object is in our consciousness, the more it resists mortality" (35). In *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, Herr Geiser's wife is a consistent presence throughout the text although she passed away a while ago; her commentary is imagined by Herr Geiser on multiple occasions and her portrait is a recurrent reminder. Therefore, although each mention of her is also a fresh reminder of human mortality, Herr Geiser's memories of her transcend the temporal boundaries of a single human life. The dimensions of individual human time bring human mortality into sharp focus, yet the novella also resists mortality through the narration of a single human life and its memorialization in Herr Geiser's memories.

Collective Human Time

The third temporal dimension in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* is that of collective, human time. The novella's title conspicuously obscures the boundaries between a single individual human and the collective category of the human; *der Mensch* (the human) refers to both (the delicate ambiguity does not hold up in the English translations). The title also provides an answer to a central question of the novel, "Wann ist der Mensch entstanden und wieso?"[85] (27-28). In this case, the meaning of *der Mensch* remains ambiguous, though one answer to the question is provided in a list of facts Herr Geiser hopes to retain in the text: "—der Mensch erscheint im Holozän"[86] (103). The verb used to formulate the initial question—*entstehen* (to arise, to originate)—is noticeably different from the one in the answer, *erscheinen* (to appear). *Entstehen* implies

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[85] "When did man first emerge, and why?" (18).
[86] "—man emerged in the Holocene" (79).

more of a process of development, similar to evolution, and is used by Frisch to describe the development of geologic formations. Moreover, *entstehen* is etymologically linked to the verbs *verstehen* (to understand) and *wahrnehmen* (to notice). *Erscheinen*, in contrast, stems from the verb *scheinen* (to appear) and carries with it the connotation of appearing in an instant, like an apparition, and disappearing equally as quickly. *Erscheinen* is closely linked to modes of perception, whereas *entstehen* indicates a process of development. Their temporal dimensions differ greatly as well because *erscheinen* implies an ephemeral moment while *entstehen* evokes a sustained process. At stake in the difference in the two verbs is the understanding of *der Mensch* as an individual human or as the collective species.

Bernhard Malkmus argues that Herr Geiser's answer and the book's title are incorrect, stating that "*Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*" is false because humans' first biological roots appeared in an earlier geologic epoch—the Pleistocene, not the Holocene. Petersen interprets the false statement in the title as an example of Herr Geiser's confusion (174). However, Malkmus argues, the *Mensch* of concern to Herr Geiser and the novel is not the human species, but the contemporary human and the very *anthropos* of the Anthropocene. Malkmus writes that, "Herr Geiser hat natürlich recht: Der Mensch, um den es ihm geht, der Mensch, der Spuren hinterlässt und Gedächtniskulturen entwickelt, der Kain, der Abel erschlug, der Ackerbauer, der mit dem Pflug die Jäger und Sammler hinter sich ließ--dieser Mensch erschien erst im Holozän"[87]

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[87] "Herr Geiser is right of course: the human that he is concerned with, the human that leaves behind traces and develops cultures of memory, the Cain, the one that slain Abel, the agrarian, the one that left behind hunters and gathers with the plow—this human first appeared in the Holocene."

("Naturgeschichten" 189). Malkmus traces the beginnings of this particular *Mensch* to the start of the Neolithic revolution, which was indeed in the Holocene.[88] Walter Obschlager similarly argues that the novella suggests "the moment in the history of mankind in which *homo sapiens* as hunter gatherer begins to decisively alter his behavior and his attitude toward nature" ("Man, Culture, and Nature" 209). This occurs, for the human species, at the end of the Pleistocene when humans begin developing agricultural practices and building housing structures, and for Geiser when, in the beginning of the novella, he attempts to build a house from crispbread.

In another analysis of the novella, Malkmus investigates the etymological roots of the name Geiser to connect him to goat herders and further link him to the Neolithic era ("Man in the Anthropocene" 75). He also notes the name's connection to the word geyser, and "the element force of a geyser, which Herr Geiser witnessed in Iceland" and that it is a common name in the Bern region of Switzerland, suggesting that Herr Geiser is an "everyman" (75). While some of these connections Malkmus draws out in his analysis of Herr Geiser's name add to interpretations of the novella, others are rather tenuous. For example, the connection to goat herding and the Neolithic area is based on a slight similarity; Malkmus writes that the name Geiser "hints at the Upper German word *Geiß* (*geiz* in medieval German) for (female) goat, so that his name additionally connotes a goatherd" ("Man in the Anthropocene" 75). Additionally, Malkmus misses the connection between Herr Geiser as an everyman and Gottlieb Biedermann, the main

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[88] Similarly, Stobbe argues that condition of Herr Geiser's "intellektuell[e] und kognitiv[e] Fähigkeiten" lead to his false declaration that man appeared in the Holocene (359).

figure of Frisch's play *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (*The Fire Raisers*) first performed on stage in 1958. In the play, the surname Biedermann is often interchanged with "Jedermann," meaning everyman (75). Ultimately, the name Geiser carries less significance than the other narrative elements that blur the lines between individual and collective humans.

The free indirect speech of the narrator further adds to the ambiguity of whether *der Mensch* refers to an individual person or collective humans. For example, during the night before Herr Geiser leaves for his hike, he has difficulties with sleep. The narrator explains: "Herr Geiser will nicht schlafen; so viel Zeit hat der Mensch nicht"[89] (*Holozän* 88). In this case, *der Mensch* could refer to Herr Geiser or to humans in general. In either case, the comment evokes an ominous perspective of the future. For Herr Geiser, it signals his declining health and the potential of death and stands in contrast to a remark on the novella's first page, "Herr Geiser hat Zeit"[90] (9). Such matter-of-fact and generalized descriptions of *der Mensch* distances the narrator from Herr Geiser, creating the pretense of objectivity that the narrator often exploits with subjective commentary.

One of the clippings tellingly included in the novella is an encyclopedia entry on "Mensch" (71). The entry classifies the human as a "*geschichtl. Wesen*" ("*historical being*") with the ability to conceive of and work toward a future: "Höhere Tiere lassen Hoffnungen und Befürchtungen erkennen, nur der [Mensch] ‚hat Zukunft'"[91] (71). The encyclopedia entry also describes humans' expansion across the globe and how they

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[89] "Geiser has no desire for sleep; a person does not have that much time—" (68).
[90] "Geiser has time to spare" (3), literally "Geiser has time."
[91] "The more highly developed animals display hopes and fears, but only [Man] works toward a 'future'" (53).

transformed the land to meet their needs, providing a description of humans' impact on the nonhuman environment that is striking in its resemblance to the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene today. In contrast to animals, the entry states, humans do not react instinctively to a given environment. Instead, they manipulate the natural conditions around them through intelligence, actions and work (72). The *Mensch* described in this case is clearly of the Anthropocene since it alters its physical surroundings on a planetary scale: "Weite Gebiete der Erdoberfläche hat [der Mensch] für seine Lebensbedürfnisse umgestaltet; der Anteil der Kulturlandschaft nimmt ständig zu"[92] (72). Moreover, the collective human *Mensch* of the novel resembles the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene in that it is meant to designate the whole human species, but really only stands for a certain group of people. In Frisch's novella, the collective human *Mensch* is clearly Western European; the books Herr Geiser reads and the entries he clips are all from sources deeply rooted in Enlightenment thought.[93]

Herr Geiser's library presents an orderly snapshot of his personal interests, a trajectory of his life, and additionally symbolizes collective human knowledge through his collection of reference works. The works are almost exclusively nonfiction—even the children's book for his grandchildren is nonfiction—and the handwritten notes that Herr Geiser later adds to the wall are concerned with facts that are evidence of collective

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[92] "[Man] has transformed large areas of the earth's surface to meet his needs, and the proportion of civilized areas in the world is constantly increasing" (54).
[93] The encyclopedia entry on *Mensch* gives a description of humans' conditions for existence that is strikingly Kantian: "er ist sich selbst unausschöpfliches Thema kraft seiner Fähigkeit, sich (als das 'Subjekt') der Welt, in der er lebt (den 'Objekten') gegenüberzustellen" (71) ("an inexhaustible field of inquiry is opened to [man] by his ability to regard himself (the 'subject') in relation to the world in which he lives (the 'object')" (53).). For more on Kantian traces in the novella see Bunge.

human knowledge rather than personal notes or memories. Furthermore, the reference books as an anthology of collective human knowledge function to confirm some of Geiser's fears about a potential landslide. The book on the history of Ticino, for example, documents numerous instances in which rock avalanches flattened nearby villages. One entry details a rock slide that destroyed a village in 1512 (22), and another describes floods from 1868 which "die Kirche von Loderio begruben, alle Brücken des Bleniotales zerstörten und Schrecken und Tod in Malvaglia, Semione, Dongio und besonders in Corzoneso verbreiteten"[94] (23). Another clipping from a more recent book (the previous entries are written in Gothic script), lists the years of flooding in the area (27). These records, assembled over decades, exemplify the human as an historical being ("geschichtliches Wesen") as described in the encyclopedia clipping on "der Mensch." The entries that detail previous natural disasters emphasize Geiser's powerlessness over the forces of nature; spread out over a collective human time scale, this powerful force of nonhuman nature is made clear.

Often, the narrator blurs the lines between the individual and collective *Mensch*. For example, a single line offers an ambiguous threat: "Schlimm wäre der Verlust des Gedächtnisses—"[95] (13). Here it is unclear whose memory is at stake, especially in German where one would expect a possessive pronoun but finds the definite article *des* instead. The statement is applicable to both an individual and the broader category of human memory. The ambiguity of these remarks allows the narrator to speak of memory

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[94] "which buried the church of Loderio, destroyed all bridges in the Blenio valley, and brought terror and death to Malvaglia, Semione, Dongio, and especially to Corzoneso" (14).
[95] "What would be bad would be losing one's memory—" (6).

loss in general, on the level of a faculty shared by all humans, which also includes to Herr Geiser's memory loss in particular. A subsequent line again conveys this ambiguity: "Ohne Gedächtnis kein Wissen"[96] (14).

In this way, the temporalities of the novella are frequently blurred together. Like the stratified layers of the earth's past that Herr Geiser observes on the rock face and that are detailed in the encyclopedia entry on "*Geologische Formationen*," the clippings he hangs on the wall become a layered record of both his individual life and the collective human past. The pages he cuts out come from books that symbolize different time periods of his life; the travel guide for Iceland he used thirty years ago, a history of the Ticino canton which he likely acquired after moving from Basel fourteen years earlier, and the Bible that he hasn't read in years, while also symbolizing collective human knowledge in general (18). Eventually, Herr Geiser removes the oil portrait of his late wife to make room for more clippings, including one on *Gedächtnisschwäche* (weakness of memory), conveying a displacement of personal memories by scientific knowledge (53). These different layers of his knowledge and memory throughout his life are piled on top of one another on the wall, physically resembling the layers of the earth's history. Ultimately, they are blown away by a gust of wind in a symbolic action that frames Herr Geiser's life and collective human life as insignificant in comparison to nonhuman forces.

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[96] "No knowledge without memory" (6).

Temporality Beyond the Human

The novella's title *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* evokes the three temporalities I discuss above of geologic, individual and collective human time. *Der Mensch* refers to both a single human and the collective human species and the mention of the Holocene evokes geologic dimensions of the deep past. Yet, beyond these three temporalities in the novella, there is a fourth that Frisch hints at—a temporality beyond the human. There are numerous mentions of changing environmental conditions such as moving continents and rising sea level that threaten the current conditions for human existence. Though Frisch does not explicitly link environmental changes to human influence, the changing landscape nevertheless poses a threat to human livelihood. When commenting on his preference for nonfiction works over novels, Herr Geiser's opinion is that "Romane eignen sich in diesen Tagen überhaupt nicht"[97] because they are concerned with people and relationships and play out on a backdrop that assumes the conditions for human life on the planet are a static given, "als sei das Gelände dafür gesichert, die Erde ein für allemal Erde, die Höhe des Meeresspiegels geregelt ein für allemal"[98] (16). With this observation, Frisch fittingly calls attention to the traditional role of the nonhuman environment in literature as a backdrop and points to false assumptions that we continue to hold today about the permanence of the earth as hospitable for humans.[99]

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[97] "Novels are no use at all on days like these" (8).
[98] "as if the place for these things were assured, the earth for all time earth, the sea level fixed for all time" (8).
[99] There are parallels here to Amitav Ghosh's discussion of literature in times of environmental crisis in his book *The Great Derangement*.

Furthermore, when Herr Geiser recalls his trip to Iceland, it is with fluid and detailed descriptions that stand out in contrast to the novella's otherwise short and uneven sentences and remind the reader that Herr Geiser was once younger and more agile (Petersen 179). Additionally, juxtaposition in modes of representation suggests the potency of nonhuman nature to impress upon humans.[100] Herr Geiser remembers the vast uninhabited areas in Iceland with traces from the geologic past: "In Island gibt es Moränen aus der letzten Eiszeit, die heute noch nicht überwachsen sind, ganze Täler voll Geröll, sie bleiben Wüste für alle Zeit"[101] (68). What he sees is a terrain he perceives to be unchanged over hundreds of thousands of years. However, as Malkmus notes, such an image of a human-free "Urlandschaft" in Iceland is only imaginary since there are signs of human agricultural and commercial activity. Malkmus notes that "bis auf die von Stricklava durchzogenen Teile war die Insel von relative dichter Vegetation überzogen, die dem Schiffbau und vor allem der Weidewirtschaft zum Opfer fiel"[102] ("Naturgeschichten" 189). This landscape hints of a future without humans, by pointing to what appears as a human-less area to Herr Geiser; "Welt wie vor der Erschaffung des Menschen"[103] (*Holozän* 70). The "prehistoric" landscape and absence of human influence confuses the geologic timescale, meaning that "Manchenorts ist nicht zu erraten, welches Erdzeitalter es ist"[104] (70). While the landscape may appear to Herr Geiser as *prehistoric*,

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[100] I will elaborate on the sections of fluid prose in a later section.
[101] "In Iceland there are moraines from the late Ice Age that are still not overgrown, whole valleys full of rock debris that will never be anything but desert" (50).
[102] "except for the parts that were covered with rope lava, the island was covered with relatively dense vegetation that fell prey to shipbuilding and, especially, pasture farming."
[103] "A world before the creation of man" (52).
[104] "In many places it is impossible to guess in what era one is" (52).

it is only insofar as he cannot identify human history in the area. In fact, it is filled with nonhuman stories and history.

A number of lines in the novella emphasize the human's position relative to nature. While in Iceland, Geiser is confronted with possibilities of a future beyond humans. He sees islands created by hardened lava and birds that start to make their home there and surmises that these lifeforms will likely outlive humans. The birds eat the fish and "ihre Exkremente sind der Anfang einer Oase, die Menschen bewohnen können, bis eine nächste Lava alles erstickt. Wahrscheinlich sind es Fische, die uns überleben, und die Vögel"[105] (71). Immediately following this remark is an encyclopedia clipping on "*Mensch*." The constellation of the remark about humans living on a foundation of bird droppings that is followed by the encyclopedia describing human exceptionalism articulates the perceived separation between humans and the nonhuman world.

The novel's four temporalities set up the conditions for Frisch to examine a central theme: the dialectical and sometimes antagonistic relationship between humans and nature. The geologic, individual and collective temporalities each contain instances of humans striving to assert their position opposite of nature in ways in which they assert dominance. Overall, the novella frames humans as often attempting to conquer nature, but with little success. Writing in 1986, Francis Michael Sharp provided insightful remarks on the role of technology in Frisch's work and private life. In a comparison of *Homo Faber* and *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, he wrote perceptively that "Geiser

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[105] "their excrement will form the beginning of an oasis in which human beings can live, until the next stream of lava smothers it all. Probably the fish will outlive us, and the birds" (53).

learns the distinctly unique lesson of old age in the world of contemporary technology that despite man's capacity to subjugate nature, this capacity cannot grant him the ancient dream of immortality. If his destiny is to 'appear' in the Holocene, as the German title indicates, it is also to disappear" (Sharp 561).[106] What Sharp leaves out here, is that this destiny is not solely Herr Geiser's, but it is shared by all humans and it is brought into sharp focus through the constellation of human and nonhuman temporalities in the novella. Additionally, Herr Geiser's Matterhorn story also presents an example of humans in an attempt to overcome nature and nearly losing their lives in the process (131-135). In one example, the narrator frames Herr Geiser's efforts at retaining knowledge of the natural world as useless: "Was heißt Holozän! Die Natur braucht keine Namen. Das weiß Herr Geiser. Die Gesteine brauchen sein Gedächtnis nicht"[107] (139). Another example illustrates nature's indifference to humans: "—Katastrophen kennt allein der Mensch, sofern er sie überlebt; die Natur kennt keine Katastrophen"[108] (103).

Nature's likely dominance over humans is most clearly illustrated in the novella when Herr Geiser's clippings are effortlessly blown off the wall. Unlike the expansive time scale of geologic eras, Herr Geiser's life appears fleeting and he realizes that his efforts to preserve his memory are useless: "Es gäbe noch vieles an die Wände zu kleben, wenn es nicht zwecklos wäre, weil das Klebeband, MAGIC TAPE, nichts taugt; ein Durchzug, wenn Corinne die Fensterläden öffnet, und die Zettel liegen auf dem Teppich,

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[106] For further discussion of humans versus nature in *Homo Faber* see Obschlager "Man, Culture, and Nature."
[107] "Who cares about the Holocene? Nature needs no names. Geiser knows that. The rocks do not need his memory" (107).
[108] "—only human beings can recognize catastrophes, provided they survive them; Nature recognizes no catastrophes" (79).

ein Wirrwarr, das keinen Sinn gibt"[109] (137). The ease with which the slips of paper are blown away evoke the fragility of human memory, as well as the time span of one human life in relation to geologic history as mentioned above. Moreover, the materiality of the clippings, which I will discuss more in the last section of this chapter, highlights the relationship between humans and nonhumans. In contrast to an assemblage of information in the contemporary context that can be easily saved, duplicated and assembled, such as Wikipedia or other online databases, the physical clippings and adhesive tape reflects the technology time at which Frisch wrote the novella. Landing in a cluttered mess that mirrors Herr Geiser's memory loss and confusion post-stroke, the layered record of his life and his own history is easily blown away by another force of nature—a gust of wind.

Although these examples all frame humans as relatively insignificant in the face of nonhuman nature—the comparison of humans with massive mountains and dinosaurs leaves the human looking trivial—the novella still remains sympathetic to the human. With the different layers of time, Frisch is able to construct a poignant commentary on the relationship between humans and their environment while not dismissing human life entirely. In other words, Herr Geiser remains a sympathetic figure to the reader while the overarching narrative expresses the insignificance of the human species on a geologic scale. Frisch's novella succeeds in telling both human and nonhuman stories and ultimately performs one of the goals of environmental literature by decentering—but not

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[109] "There would still be many things to stick to the wall if there were any point in it; the Magic Tape is useless; a puff of air as Corinne opens the shutters and the slips of paper are lying on the floor, a confused heap that makes no sense" (106).

dismissing—the human and opening up stories to a broader horizon of shared agencies beyond the human.

Narration and Intermediality

By far the most distinct aspect of *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* is the constellation of text and images in the novella. The collage style creates another layer of narrative as the reader must trace Herr Geiser's thinking and, at times, reconstruct what his thought process was that lead him to turn to specific entries. Often, the reason why a certain entry is positioned where it is in the text and what information the excerpt provides remains unclear. What role do the clippings play in the narrative? Do they add important information necessary for understanding other parts of the novella? What do the clippings say that the narrator cannot? Do they somehow function to correct the objectivity lost with the free indirect speech of the narrator? Combined with the narration, these formal elements present a distinct take on narrative strategies in relation to geologic timescales. The following section will explore the particularities of the narrator and narrative style, the text/image collage and, finally, the materiality of the novella and the real, spatial demands that result from the text/image collage.

Petersen writes that Frisch had been experimenting with a new "Erzählweise" (manner of narration) since 1972 and his interest in the collage style that incorporates elements of nonfiction maps neatly onto a similar trend that reemerged in theater in previous years—documentary theater. Documentary theater incorporates factual information both as the basis of its script and as part of the staging of a theatrical production. Born in the immediate period following World War I and led in large party by the German playwright Erwin Piscator, documentary style theater aimed to

incorporate realities of war and the style developed again after World War II and partly out of the New Left movements of the 1960s (Irmer 18). Thomas Irmer writes that documentary theater "offered a dramaturgy that replaced fictional narrative or parable with "real" situations and characters based on documents and research, structured and arranged for the stage" (17). On the one hand, Frisch's incorporation of nonfiction material shows similarities to documentary theater. On the other, translating this documentary style into printed fiction led to a collage-like constellation of text and image that was also popular with other German fiction authors at the time. Petersen lists notable examples of other works that utilize the collage technique, especially two novels from 1970, Arno Schmidt's *Zettels Traum* and Andreas Okopenko's *Lexikon-Roman*: *Lexikon einer sentimentalen Reise zum Exporteurtreffen in Druden*. However, in contrast to these novels, the collage elements in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* are inextricably linked to the narrative because the reader must trace Herr Geiser's thought process by connecting the clippings to his thoughts and actions. In a way, the text/image collage *is* the narrative; the story takes place in-between the clipping and what the narrator describes. As Peterson argues, the narrator doesn't need to narrate the story because "Dem Leser wird vor Augen geführt, was der Alte liest und wie vergeßlich er ist; der Narrator braucht dergleichen nicht zu erzählen"[110] (175).

Frisch's prose in the novella is choppy with frequent interruptions and changes in topic that clue the reader in on Herr Geiser's worsening cognitive condition. The short sentences show Herr Geiser's attempts to pass the time and reflect his interrupted thought

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[110] "It is made clear to the reader, what the old man reads and how forgetful he is; the narrator does not need to narrate."

processes, especially after he suffers a stroke.[111] This includes a number of lists, as previously mentioned, such as attempts at categorizing types of thunder and making an inventory of the provisions in his house. The novella's narrator is a complex heterodiegetic—outside of the narrative—third person figure. Frisch uses free indirect speech (*erlebte Rede*), which blurs the lines between the narrator's narration and the thoughts of Herr Geiser, to narrate the story. At times, the omniscient narrator seems to mock Herr Geiser's struggle with memory, especially as his condition worsens. In certain passages, it is unclear whether more subjective remarks belong to Herr Geiser or if the narrator is inserting subjective commentary about Herr Geiser's actions. After he returns from his long hike, for example, a single line comments on his failed trip: "Herr Geiser wird das Tal nicht verlassen"[112] (111). This remark is immediately followed by another, in parentheses, and also a single line: "(Möglich wäre es gewesen!)"[113] (111). While the first states matter-of-factly an account of the situation, the second provides a subjective value judgement, with the subjunctive formulation *wäre gewesen* (would have been) removing the remark from objective reality. The parentheses, which often appear in the novella, further obscure the boundaries of narration, heightening the reader's doubt that the narrator is an objective one. These short sentences are often interrupted, ending in a dash and signaling Herr Geiser's interrupted or confused thought process, despite the fact that the narration remains in the third person. Especially as the novella progresses and Herr Geiser's cognitive state worsens, the narrator's commentary becomes more and

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[111] Cf. Handke's dense and flowing prose.
[112] "Geiser has no wish to leave the valley" (84), literally "Geiser will not leave the valley".
[113] "(He could have done so!)" (84), literally "(It would have been possible!)"

more subjective and it becomes difficult to distinguish between the narrating voice and Herr Geiser's consciousness.

Michael Butler describes the narrator as "an abstract 'narrator'" that "constantly accompanies Herr Geiser and relativizes his perspective with a gentle ironic humor" ("Interpretation" 567). At times, however, the narrator's subjective comments go beyond a "gentle ironic humor" and mock the aging protagonist. During his failed hike, for example, a gentle question showing Herr Geiser's worsening condition, "Was soll Herr Geiser in Basel?"[114] (105), morphs into a mocking and frustrated outburst a few pages later: "Was soll Herr Geiser in Basel!"[115] (109). The narrator's impatience with Herr Geiser and the resulting mocking tone is encouraged at times by impersonal language that creates distance between Herr Geiser and the narrator. Most notably, of course, is that the narrator only refers to the protagonist with the formal address Herr Geiser; his first name is never given. Distance between the narrator and Herr Geiser is also created through the frequent use of the impersonal pronoun "man" in the narrative, for example, in short comments that can have the appearance of being general remarks, but that are obviously addressing Herr Geiser's circumstances in particular. Some examples include: "Alt wird man überall" (42), "Irgendetwas vergißt man immer" (75) and "Meistens denkt man im Gehen gar nichts"[116] (101).

When the narrator describes how Herr Geiser switches from cutting out sections of books to hang on the wall to writing notes by hand, moreover, the subtle switch from

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[114] "What use would Basel be to him?" (80).
[115] "What use would Basel be to him!" (83).
[116] "People can grow old anywhere" (30), "One always forgets something" (56), "Usually on a walk one thinks of nothing" (77).

using Herr Geiser to "man" frames Herr Geiser as a figure to be pitied: "Es genügt nicht, daß Herr Geiser in diesem oder jenem Buch mit seinem Kugelschreiber anstreicht, was wissenswert ist; schon eine Stunde später erinnert man sich nur noch ungenau"[117] (28). While the first half of the sentence comments on Herr Geiser in particular, the second switches to "man." In this case, the switch to "man" also functions to make Herr Geiser's issues with memory retention appear common and not just an issue faced by him. Yet, because the reader knows that "man" still refers to Herr Geiser, the attempt to create distance form Herr Geiser only evokes pity. Michael Hamburger notes that the "minimal narration leaves all sorts of gaps to be filled by the reader's imagination—and sympathy too" (983). Additional formulations also create distance between the narrator and Herr Geiser and further obscures the boundary between the individual person (Herr Geiser) and the collective *Mensch* as previously discussed. One example that stands out is the remark: "Offenbar fallen Hirnzellen aus"[118] (*Holozän* 45). Again, it is clear to the reader that the brain cells referred to are Herr Geiser's, yet because of the lack of a personal pronoun (seine Hirnzellen or his brain cells), the comment reads as detached and cold, especially since it is concerned with a sad development in the protagonist's life. The distant narrator doesn't change after Herr Geiser suffers his stroke, and the novella ends after the encyclopedia entry on "*Schlaganfall*"—apoplexy or stroke—with a long, fluid description of nonhuman life in the valley. In contrast to Herr Geiser, "Das Dorf steht

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[117] "It is not enough for Geiser to draw a line with his ballpoint pen against passages in this book or that worth remembering; within an hour his memory of then has become hazy" (19), literally "…within an hour one only remembers inaccurately."
[118] "Obviously brain cells are ceasing to function" (32).

unversehrt"[119] (141). The juxtaposition reiterates a theme of the novel that "die Natur kennt keine Katastrophen"[120] especially in the sense of human catastrophes (103).

In addition to the narrator's general comments about aging and losing brain function, the inclusion of the clippings slowly reveals Herr Geiser's illness and struggle with memory loss. Moreover, as Pabis argues, the novella confronts the reader with information regarding what Herr Geiser remembers, but more often the information is in regard to what he does not remember (77-78). Combined with the narrative style and the frequently unfinished or interrupted sentences, the addition of the clippings in the text puts the reader into the position of someone with *Gedächtnisschwäche* (weakness of memory) trying to follow a foreign thought process. The mixture of text and image both traces Herr Geiser's thoughts and actions and offers another layer of commentary in the novella through the specific ordering of the snippets as they often remark on human and nonhuman interactions. Suspicions that Herr Geiser might have suffered a stroke after he returns from his failed hike with a numb eyelid are confirmed by the encyclopedia entry on "Apoplexy" (141).[121]

The constellation of clippings from various texts and the hand-written notes signals Frisch's concern with individual and collective knowledge. This is especially illustrated when Herr Geiser takes down the portrait painting of his late wife to make space for more clippings; "Das Bildnis von Elsbeth (Öl) von der Wand zu nehmen, um

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[119] "The village stands unharmed" (110).
[120] "Nature recognizes no catastrophes" (79).
[121] The numb eyelid is another example of the impersonal "man" creating distance: "Es ist das Augenlid links. Kein Schmerz. Wenn man das Augenlid mit dem Finger berührt, so fühlt das Augenlid überhaupt nichts" (121) ("It is his left eyelid. No pain. When one puts a finger on it, there is no feeling at all in the eyelid" (93)).

Platz zu haben für weitere Zettel, hat Herr Geiser bis heute gezögert. Es ist aber nichts anders zu Machen"[122] (53). An encyclopedia entry on "Gedächtnisschwäche" ("Weakness of memory") immediately follows the passage, suggesting that Herr Geiser replaces his late wife's portrait with the clipping, preforming "Gedächtnisschwäche" by "forgetting" his wife through the act of taking down her portrait. For Crauewels, the text/image collage is a "sprachlose Sprache"[123] that comes closer to representing genuine human experience; "Nicht die Sprache stellt hier hauptsächlich die Imagination her, wohl aber der kompositorische Rhythmus und die Konstellationen von Montage und Collage"[124] (118-119). Malkmus argues that "Frisch's collage shows, rather than tells, the ultimate disarray of central epistemic categories taken for granted in modernity" ("Man" 73). I agree with Malkmus that the collage is a fundamental narrative shift that enables Frisch to show rather than tell, but what is at stake in the narrative mode reaches beyond concepts of modernity. Instead, the collage places collective human history (and therefore knowledge) represented by the nonfiction works in contrast to the capacity of nonhuman nature and highlights the mortality of an individual human and humans in general.

Noticeably, there are two instances of fluid prose that span multiple pages and stand in sharp contrast to the otherwise choppy passages; the first is Herr Geiser's recollections of trip to Iceland and the second is his Matterhorn story. Despite his trouble remembering facts, where he placed his hat and whether he already heated up the soup,

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[122] "So far Geiser has hesitated to take down Elsbeth's portrait (in oil) from the wall to make room for more items. But now there is no other way" (39).
[123] "speechless language"
[124] "It is not the language that establishes the imagination, but rather the compositional rhythm and the constellation of montage and collage."

these two memories are recalled easily and with great detail, especially when concerning details of the nonhuman environment. Petersen analyzes the narrative elements of the novella in great detail and notes how the Matterhorn story stands out both for its contrast to the rest of the novella and for its own narrative complexities. The story is recounted in three parts; the first, like the rest of the novella, is told in present tense while the last two are both told in the past tense. Petersen's hypothesis about the sudden appearance of detailed prose is that Frisch aimed to show the difference between the younger Herr Geiser and the elderly protagonist who perceives the world and his surroundings "nur noch in kleinen, oft zusammenhanglosen Ausschnitten"[125] (179). I agree with Petersen's interpretation of the narrative style, but he fails to mention Herr Geiser's recollection of Iceland that similarly stands out against the rest of the text. Because both passages deal with Herr Geiser's memories of being in extreme landscapes and natural conditions, I argue that one possibility for understanding the two lucid memories is that they are both connected to an experience of storied matter. The juxtaposition between the uneven and interrupted short sentences and the flowing prose highlights the complexity of memory and raises compelling questions about how memory functions. Especially as he nears death, these memories offer the potential to transcend his mortality. The Matterhorn episode occurred over fifty years ago, yet "Seine Matterhorn-Geschichte kennt man, Herr Geiser hat sie oft genug erzählt, sogar die Enkelkinder mögen sie nicht mehr hören"[126]

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[125] "now only in small, often incoherent excerpts."
[126] "His Matterhorn story is well known, Geiser has told it so often that even his grandchildren are tired of it" (99).

(*Holozän* 128). His trek up the Matterhorn transforms from an experience, into a memory and finally into a story that can continue to be told.

Materiality of the Novel

The clippings and handwritten notes scattered throughout *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* both remove conventional boundaries between nonfiction and fiction and place demands on the text in a material way. The entries were taken from published works and a bibliography is listed in the back of the book. It includes the Bible, a history of the Ticino Canton, histories of the Locarno region, reference books on dinosaurs, the twelve volume Brockhaus encyclopedia and Duden German Dictionary among many others. While the clippings interact with the text to tell one story, they also tell a story in their own right. Their spatial arrangement often tells a different story, one that the narrator couldn't tell. In a striking example that Geert Crauwels points out, the encyclopedia entry on *Mensch* is featured in the exact center of the book (on page 71 of 143, in the middle of the page). Frisch places humans at the center of the novella in what Crauwels correctly points out as "wörtlicher Anthropozentrismus" (literal anthropocentrism) (117). Another example of the meaning created by the physical arrangement of the clippings is a series of pages toward the end of the novella where images far outnumber text. The passage begins with an encyclopedia entry on erosion and is follow by, in order, information on the first chestnut trees planted in the region, an encyclopedia entry on eschatology, the dictionary entry for "coherent," information on chestnut canker (*Kastanienkrebs*), a passage on Roman occupation of the region and, finally, the encyclopedia entry about strokes (*Holozän* 139-141). The first entry on erosion signals Herr Geiser's deteriorating (or eroding) cognitive condition and

foreshadows the entry on stroke at the end of the grouping of excerpts. Of this specific constellation, Franz Haberl suggests that the ordering of the clippings convey a distinct meaning: "… there is a 'coherence,' an organic connection between dying trees, the downfall of empires, and the death of individual human beings" (584).

In another instance, the constellation of clippings and text tell a story of evolution and extinction. The first in this series is a bible verse that details how God gave animals to humans and it is followed by a hand-written list of twenty-seven types of dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures and the encyclopedia entry that details how humans and animals are affected by weather. Following a text passage that describes how cutting passages out with nail scissors makes things easier is a series of images; an illustration of the theory of continental drift, three different dinosaur illustrations, then another text passage describing how taping pictures on the wall means the text on the back will be hidden, an illustration of a Tyrannosaurus rex and, finally, an image of a dinosaur skull. Stobbe comments on the dominance of the images in these pages and how they function in the novella to highlight a certain narrative:

> Das Bild dominiert auf diesen Seiten gegenüber der Schrift -- und doch geht auch aus dieser Anordnung das zentrale Thema hervor: der evolutionäre Wandel und das Verschwinden der einstigen und heutigen Herrscher auf der Erde im Zuge erdmorphologischer Veränderungen. Hinsichtlich der Zukunft des Menschen als

Spezies lässt sich folgern: Nicht nur seine Rückbildung, auch sein gänzliches Verschwinden ist möglich.[127] (368)

Beyond the presence of the clippings in the text, their physical arrangement plays a significant role and creates narrative dimensions exceeding the written narrative.

The Deutsches Literatur Archiv (German literary archive) in Marbach holds the first typed manuscript version of the novella, which shows where the physical clippings were added to the text. Additionally, the archive has the original copies of the hand-written notes included in the book in carefully printed block letters, though it is unclear whether Frisch wrote the notes himself. When examining the original manuscript and the following versions that incorporated Frisch's notes, it becomes clear that the excerpts included place spatial demands on the rest of the text. Considering the actual material and spatial demands of the text/image collage offers another interpretive possibility and raises further questions about how the line spacing in the text functions and about how the physical clippings included in the text directly influenced Frisch's writing process. Insights emerge from looking at the novella's final manuscript proofs with Frisch's notes. The pages are printed on paper with clearly marked and numbered lines, creating a defined space within which the narrative unfolds. The finite space offered by each page parallels the finite space of Herr Geiser's walls and because the clippings appear as images embedded within each page of the novella, there are spatial demands that force

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[127] "The imagine dominates compared to the text on these pages—yet the central theme still emerges from this composition: the evolutionary change and the disappearance of the former and current rulers of the earth in the course of geomorphic changes. In regard to the future of humans as a species it can be concluded: not just their regression but also their complete disappearance is possible."

the images and text to remain within the given margins. These finitudes also mirror Herr Geiser's cognitive capacity and he has to make decisions about what to include and what to take down, as in the example of the portrait of his wife that he removes. Attanucci compares the space on the wall to the finite space of a computer's hard drive or a memory stick, noting that the limits of finitude force Herr Geiser to determine what is most important (17).

The effects of these spatial demands are evident in the novella's original manuscript and Frisch's revisions, and a story emerges in which Frisch adds or deletes lines of text in order to make the spacing even between his text and the clipping. Comparing the final published version with the publisher's proof and Frisch's hand-written edits from January 1979, it becomes clear that one of the novella's most known lines was changed. The original manuscript has the line "-der Mensch kennt Katastrophen, sofern er sie überlebt; die Natur kennt keine Katastrophen"[128] that Frisch changes to the following, which appears in the published version: "-Katastrophen kennt allein der Mensch, sofern er sie überlebt; die Natur kennt keine Katastrophen"[129] (103).[130] The difference is small and without grammatical relevance in German (the subject remains the same, only the word order changes) yet the shift in word order is significant because it literally decenters the human by shifting *der Mensch* to a later position in the sentence.

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[128] "the human knows catastrophes, provided he survives them; nature knows no catastrophes" (my literal translation).
[129] "catastrophes are known by the human, provided he survives them; nature knows no catastrophes" (my literal translation).
[130] DLA Marbach: Mappe 4: Korrekturfahne mit handschriftlichen Korrekturen des Autors, 22.01.1979, 103.

In another example, adjectives are added to a description of the natural processes and effects of the river in the area. In detailing the changes in the valley that are caused by the river and melting glaciers, a line describes how, "die scharfen Kanten der Blöcke bleiben von Jahr zu Jahr dieselben, nur die runden glatten bunten Kiesel im Bach sind von Jahr zu Jahr vermutlich andere"[131] (64). Frisch's edits show that he added the adjectives "…runden glatten bunten…"[132] to the sentence in order to add a line to that paragraph so that there would only be one blank line before the next paragraph, a single sentence: "Erosion ist ein langsamer Vorgang"[133] (64). The addition of the adjectives ensured that the sentence on erosion would stand out on the page with equal amounts of black space before and after.

It is clear that Frisch saw the pages as a bounded space, similar to a canvas and that he was deeply concerned about the aesthetics of this "blank" space. His careful attention to spacing allows for the short sentences that take up a single line to stand out and more closely resemble the interrupted, choppy thoughts of the aging protagonist, as Crauwels also remarks. In this context, "wird der Stellenwert eines jeden einzelnen Wortes umso wichtiger und es entsteht ein starkes Spannungsfeld zwischen dem Ausgesprochenen und dem Unausgesprochenen"[134] (Crauwels 114-115). Moreover, the short sentences and clippings make the few passages of flowing, fluid prose stand out even more.

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[131] "the sharp-edged boulders remain unchanged from year to year, though the bright and smooth round pebbles are presumably different ones" (47).
[132] "…bright and smooth round…"
[133] "Erosion is a slow process" (48).
[134] "The significance of the place of each individual word becomes even more important and a strong tension develops between the spoken and the unspoken."

Another striking addition to the text by Frisch calls attention to the materiality of the collage. The edited manuscript shows that Frisch added the following to page 116: "Was Herr Geiser nicht bedacht hat: der Text auf der Ruckseite, den Herr Geiser erst bemerkt, nachdem er die Illustrationen auf der Vorderseite sorgsam ausgeschnitten hat, wäre vielleicht nicht minder aufschlussreich gewesen; nun ist dieser Text zerstückelt, unbrauchbar für den Zettelwand"[135] (116). Since this remark was added after the original manuscript, it becomes clear that Frisch reflects on the actual problem he realized when arranging the physical clippings from published works and no doubt noticed that affixing the clippings in the text meant that whatever text or image was on the other side of the text would be hidden.

Readers at the time of publication also took note of the spatial dimensions of *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*. One in particular, Winfried Wild writing in the *Schwabische Zeitung* in 1979, criticizes Frisch and the publisher Suhrkamp for publishing the book with such little text. While Wild's critique of the novella is positive when it concerns the story and Frisch's writing, he writes that he feels cheated out of his 22 Mark (around 11€ today) for a book that contains so little text. Wild writes that there isn't any law for books as there is for food packaging, "über das Verhältnis von Inhalt und Umhüllung, hier: Wörtern und Buch"[136] (Wild). He continues, "Man wähle ein kleines Buchformat, starkes Papier, großen Schriftgrad, viel Zeilendurchschuß, und wenn man vorn geschickt anfängt, kommt man am Schluß an den Beginn eines neuen Bogens,

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[135] "Something Geiser has not taken into account: that the text on the back of the page might perhaps be no less illuminating than the picture on the front that he has so carefully cut out; now this text has been cut to pieces, useless for his gallery" (89).
[136] "about the relationship between content and packaging, in this case: words and book"

dessen restliche Leerseiten das Buch noch ein bißchen dicker machen"[137] (Wild). Another reviewer, in *Der kleine Bund* (the former weekend supplement of the Swiss daily newspaper published in Bern), finds what Frisch achieves in so few words to be impressive: "Was nun Inhalt und Thematik angeht, so ist zunächst eine überraschende grosse, anfänglich sogar etwas verwirrende Vielfalt zu konstatieren"[138] ("Die Steine").

Frisch's concern with material space should come as no surprise given his background in architecture. Frisch had started his university studies in *Germanistik* (German studies), but ultimately ended pursuing this degree for financial reasons. He then began sending his writing—journalistic pieces, theater reviews, book reviews—to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* where they were subsequently published. He also acted as a correspondent while serving during World War II, and his reflections on war and life as a solider were eventually published in a diary-style form as *Blätter aus dem Brotsack* (*Pages from the Lunch Bag*) in 1940. After the war, Frisch received funding from a friend to begin studying architecture and he matriculated at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in Zurich in 1936. Frisch's father, Franz Bruno Frisch, was also an architect, albeit self-taught, but switched to selling real estate after the war (Hage 12). Frisch worked as an architect until 1955, writing and producing plays the entire time. His greatest project was the outdoor swimming pool Freibad Letzigraben, which still remains in use in Zurich (Hage 53). Michael Hamburger

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[137] "one would have to select a small book format, strong paper, a large font size, a lot of line spacing, and when one begins skillfully from the beginning, then at the end one comes to the start of a new sheet of paper that makes the rest of the book's empty pages a bit thicker still"

[138] "As far as content and topic are concerned, there is a surprisingly large, even somewhat initially confusing diversity to be stated"

remarks in his 1980 review in *The Times Literary Supplement* that the "extreme dryness and brevity of Frisch's manner in this work makes it tend towards anti-fiction" and that "Frisch has always felt uncomfortable with the prolixity and emotiveness of conventional fiction" (983). There are further connections to nonfiction in Frisch's background as a journalist for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and a number of journals he published.[139] In the case of *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, the inclusion of nonfiction texts in narrative fiction offers new perspectives on narration, temporality and the place of humans in the world.

At a few different points in the novel, a subjective remark appears about life in the valley. It appears to be Herr Geiser's rebuttal to his late wife Elsbeth about their decision to move to the quiet town from the city of Basel; "Alles in allem kein totes Tal"[140] (60). Presumably, the comment rejects the idea that there is no excitement or cultural happenings in the small valley town. Through the lens of material ecocriticism, however, the valley can be interpreted as the actual, physical structures. In this case, the valley is certainly not dead—or lifeless, static, frozen. Rather, it is a dynamic area that emerged over hundreds of millions of years and continues to change in ways that are difficult for humans to comprehend. Through the distinct combination of different temporal scales (individual, collective, geologic and nonhuman), attention to nonhuman forces and the formal narrative elements, Frisch succeeds in his attempt "ein Tal zu erzählen" (to narrate a valley) (Briefwechsel 50).

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[139] See Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-1949* and *Tagebuch 1966-1971*.
[140] "All in all, not a deserted valley" (45), literally, "All in all not a dead valley."

Chapter 3:
The Incredulous Geologist: Language, Narration and Doubt in Peter Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr*

In a textbook on geomorphology (the third edition of Herbert Wilhelmy's *Geomorphologie in Stichworten* from 1977), a passage describes how, over hundreds of thousands of years, changes in the climate create valley-like terrace structures called stepped surfaces, or *Rumpftreppen* in German. *Rumpftreppen*, the passage continues, are "klimagenetische Vorzeitformen" (climo-genetic prehistoric forms), meaning that their origin—*genesis*—lies entirely in the nonhuman realm of the climate. In this particular marked-up and heavily studied copy of the textbook, a question is scribbled in the margins next to this passage: "Soll ich das alles glauben?" ("Am I to believe all this?"). Both the textbook and the incredulous remark belong to the Austrian author Peter Handke, who immersed himself in the study of geology before a trip to Alaska in 1977. The following summer, in 1978, he would return to Alaska again. Then, two years later in 1979, Handke published the short novel *Langsame Heimkehr* (*Slow Homecoming*), whose protagonist is a geologist from central Europe named Valentin Sorger who leaves his field work station in Alaska to begin his return trip back toward Europe.

The novel details Sorger's geologic explorations as he comes to terms with his sense of self, both of which are rooted in the structures of history. I find it striking that Handke's marginalia in the geology textbook point to questions of agency raised in the novel that are at the center of scholarship of material ecocriticism. In *Langsame Heimkehr*, the focus on geology means that questions of narration accompany the question of nonhuman agency: What role does the geologist play in deciphering nonhuman forces? How can nonhuman agentic forces be narrated? And what when such

forces originate in the deep past? These central questions are posed in the book itself by the narrator in regard to the geologist protagonist: "Wie aber könnte es gelingen, von Räumen, die ja an sich kein 'nach und nach' kannte, zu 'erzählen'?"[141] (200). The conspicuous quotation marks around the verb *erzählen* (to tell, to narrate) draw into question the task at hand of comprehending the immense dimensions of the deep past and attempting to articulate them in a narrative form. These vast dimensions ultimately lead to Sorger's idiosyncratic affliction—his estrangement from "form."

In this chapter, I connect the crises of language and form through the role of the geologist and use the theoretical approaches of material ecocriticism to frame the geologist's work as textual. By that I mean that the geologist performs the task of narrating material changes in a way that highlights the difficulties that arise in human attempts to understand and articulate the deep past. I will investigate the geologic past and narration by analyzing the two strains of Sorger's estrangement that trouble him greatly in the novel: his estrangement from people and his estrangement from form. Form is further divided into the form of history, natural formations, and the form of language, where the latter is, for Handke, the key to connect all three. Yet, it is clear that language also limits humans' comprehension of the massive dimensions of the geologic past and nonhuman agency, which is reflected in Sorger's incredulity. After a brief overview of the novel, previous scholarship and biographical information on Handke, I will examine the multiple levels of estrangement through the lens of material ecocriticism. I look at

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[141] "But how would it ever be possible to 'narrate' forms which knew no 'little by little'?" (this and all following English translations of *Langsame Heimkehr* are from Benjamin Kunkel's 1985 translation *Slow Homecoming*, 130)

Handke's personal journals and the geology textbooks he studied to develop an understanding of Handke's perception of the nonhuman world. Moreover, I connect questions of understanding the deep past to the estrangement from language and show how this tension plays out in attempts at representation through written language and sketching. Finally, I show how Handke comes to terms with written representations of the deep past and how this linguistic *Heimkehr* provides a "grounding" that connects the author with the material world and its storied history.

Sorger's journey from Alaska toward Europe is roughly centered in three geographic areas, which are reflected in the three sections of *Langsame Heimkehr*: *Die Vorzeitformen* (The Primordial Forms), *Das Raumverbot* (Space Prohibited), and *Das Gesetz* (The Law). The novel begins north of the Arctic circle in Alaska and slowly traces his movement east toward Europe with stops in San Francisco, Denver and finally New York City. He is afflicted by a "great formlessness" ("Groß[e] Formlosigkeit" (16)) that manifests itself in his inability to connect with others, in his work as a geologist and in language. While in Alaska, Sorger shares a small house with his colleague Lauffer in a village populated predominately by Native Americans, but he remains otherwise significantly disconnected from people. When the reader meets Sorger, he is preparing for his eventual return back to Europe and little other background information is given about him. Sorger's first attempt to depart the village on the postal airplane fails when the pilot has to turn around due to bad weather. His trip is successful the next day and he flies

to an unnamed university city on the West Coast of the US, most likely San Francisco, where he had lived for a few years (92).[142]

In San Francisco he reconnects briefly with his neighbors—a couple and their children—but still experiences estrangement and loneliness, especially when his neighbor fails to recognize him from a bus window. Sorger departs from his house and the West Coast city to continue eastwards. He stops in Colorado to visit a former school friend who works there as a ski instructor, only to find out that his friend has passed away just days ago. Again, the exact place is not mentioned, but the nickname "Mile High City" clearly points to Denver. After Colorado, he flies to New York City and connects with a stranger in a cab named Esch, who apparently also lacks human connection and begs Sorger to meet with him later. While in New York, Sorger determines a *Gesetz*—a law or maxim—to guide his existence and to reconnect him with the forms of recorded history and language, which seemingly brings him peace. Sorger's *Gesetz* is imperative to the healing he craves at the start of the novel and is the title of the third and final chapter. Although essentially untranslatable, the German term *Gesetz* resembles most closely how I interpret Sorger's law since it can be used to refer to both the laws of the natural world and of human behavior and I understand Sorger's *Gesetz* to combine these two in a type of personal maxim. The novel ends with Sorger in a plane en route to Europe.

Sorger's crisis of form, as I see it, mirrors Handke's struggle to understand, represent and narrate changes that occurred in the geologic past. As such, the *Heimkehr* is twofold: it is the literal return of Sorger to Europe *and* to the geologic origins of the earth.

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[142] Handke's refers to S.F. in his notebooks, pointing to the city being San Francisco.

The cure for his alienation from form appears to depend on understanding his personal history as part of the larger natural history, which necessitates a collapse of the perceived divide between the two historical modes (human history and natural history). There are glimpses of the possibility of combing the two along the way, but it isn't until the novel's third chapter that he determines his *Gesetz* in a New York coffee shop and seems to grasp the remedy for his alienation. After a short moment without language, he writes down his *Gesetz*, as if to make sure it doesn't vanish, and in doing so he accepts that he is not outside of history, but rather an integral part of it. He writes that recorded history is "seit jeher, eine von jedermann (auch von mir) fortsetzbare, friedensstiftende *Form*"[143] (177, original emphasis). For Sorger, his *Gesetz* roots him firmly to the earth, peacefully resolving his sense of self and connecting the past, future and present through the act of writing: "indem ich ihn aufschreiben, *soll er mein Gesetz sein*. Ich erkläre mich verantwortlich für meine Zukunft"[144] (178, original emphasis).

Langsame Heimkehr is the first part of what would become a larger tetralogy by the same name, followed by the second novel, *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* (*The Lesson of Mount Saint-Victoire*), which was published in 1980. The third, *Kindergeschichte* (*Child Story*), and fourth, *Über die Dörfer* (*Walk about the Villages*) were both published in 1981. While the story's progression between these novels makes sense geographically—*Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* begins in Europe, Sorger's presumptive destination at the end of *Langsame Heimkehr*—there are few elements that link them.

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[143] "has also, from time immemorial, been a peace-fostering *form* that can be perpetuated by anyone (including me)" (114, original emphasis).
[144] "in writing it down; *I make it my law*. I declare myself responsible for my future" (115, original emphasis).

Narratively, the prose styles in the two works vary greatly. In *Langsame Heimkehr*, the sentences are long and dense, flowing between inner perspectives and outside observations. The narrator is heterodiegetic (outside of the narrative) third person until the penultimate paragraph, when the narrator suddenly addresses the protagonist in the second person.

Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire, by contrast, begins with an autodiegetic (part of the narrative) first-person narrator, who remains nameless. The protagonist undertakes an investigation of the paintings of French artist Paul Cézanne by traveling to Aix-en-Provence and trekking through the landscapes that inspired Cézanne's works.[145] While it is possible that the first-person narrator of *Die Lehre* is identical with the protagonist Sorger of *Langsame Heimkehr*, there is very little evidence to substantiate the connection. As a result, the novel reads more like an essay on art and the first-person narrator resembles Handke himself far more than Sorger.[146] The third and fourth novels also differ greatly. In *Kindergeschichte*, the narrator is a heterodiegetic third person male who reflects on his role as a father and *Über die Dörfer* is a dramatic poem about a family conflict concerning inheritance. Due to the disparate plot and narrative styles of the four texts, the current analysis is focused only on the novel *Langsame Heimkehr*.

Early interpretations of the novel under consideration here focused on the book's departure from Handke's early prose style. Cecile Cazort Zorach calls it a "difficult and

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[145] Handke's notebooks at the time show that he flew to Madrid after his time in New York in 1978. In both cities, he spent time in art museums: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Museo del Prado in Madrid.
[146] Handke lived in Paris in the 1970s and has lived in Chaville outside of Paris since 1990.

irritating book," noting that "its style and tone become increasingly disunified as the text accommodates brief excursions into surrealistic metamorphoses, grotesque humor, veiled literary allusions, ponderous (but also parodistic) Heideggerian prose, and, finally a shift from third-person narration to an 'ich"' (181). Georg Braungart argues that the novel presents a geologic sublime characterized by "die radikale Infragestellung des Menschen in seiner *zeitlichen* Anschauungsform"[147] (27, original emphasis). Following Braungart's interest in the geologic sublime, Timothy Attanucci investigates *Langsame Heimkehr* in terms of a "geologische Kränkung" (geologic insult), a concept he borrows from Stephen Jay Gould and Sigmund Freud, but focuses far more on the present than on the past. In contrast to other works concerned with geology (including Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*), Attanucci argues, "dass die Geologie… weniger Ursache einer Kränkung, sondern vielmehr als Gegenmittle gegen die Kränkungen der menschlichen Geschichte angesehen werden kann"[148] (20).

Place plays a significant role in *Langsame Heimkehr* and from Handke's notebooks it is clear how closely Handke connects certain events with specific places, although most geographic locations remain nameless in the novel. Still, specific places mark turning points for Sorger and Handke uses short hand place names as a code for those changes in his personal journals— "S.F." for San Francisco, "P" for the mountain pass, "R.M." for the Rocky Mountains, and "C.S." for the coffee shop in New York. Thus, in his analysis, Carsten Rohde characterizes Handke's prose since *Langsame*

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[147] "the radical questioning of the human in his *temporal* conceptual form" (original emphasis).
[148] "that geology can be considered less as the cause of the insult and much rather the antidote for the insults of human history."

Heimkehr as "geopoetisch" (geopoetic). Rohde claims that all of Handke's following prose texts can be considered "in einem gewissen Sinne als poetisch verfremdete Geologie und Geographie"[149] because they all encompass acts of measuring and describing the places around him (16). Similarly, Christoph Parry examines what he calls "landscapes of discourse" in Handke's work, focusing on both the representation of real-world landscapes and the broader "discursive landscape" of literary production. These interpretations of Handke, however, are more concerned with the aesthetic and narratological function of place and landscape rather than with environmental or ecocritical perspectives.

More recent analyses of *Langsame Heimkehr* are informed by the emergence of ecocriticism and interest in the role of nature and place in literature, including the role of geology. Paul Buchholz, for instance, reads the novel in an investigation of "planetary alienation" resulting from the whole-Earth images of the early 1970s that allowed humans to see the entire planet—a view that also conceals individual humans in its magnitude. Buchholz claims that, in contrast to other authors at the time who represent the planet as a lifeless, Handke purposely avoids catastrophic or alarmist narratives in *Langsame Heimkehr* (33). Nevertheless, "the motif of the dead planet" is present in the novel as a problem that Sorger must overcome. As Buchholz observes, "A vision of a lifeless planet haunts Sorger at a moment when his sense of individual autonomy, like his capacity for subjective self-expression in language, in most acutely threatened" (33).

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[149] "as poetically alienated geology and geography in a certain sense"

Handke, born in 1942, first became known for his blunt critiques of contemporary literature in the late 1960s. His first novel *Die Hornissen* (*The Hornets*) was published in 1966 and his play *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (*Offending the Audience*) appeared in the same year. His experiments in style, form and language often lie at the core of his prose texts as is the case in *Langsame Heimkehr*. Handke scholar Klaus Kastberger explains Handke's turn to geology in the novel as a desire to find "grounding" quite literally, an impulse that first appeared while Handke was hiking in the karst formations around the border region of Austria, Slovenia and Italy. After he completed filming his project *Die linkshändige Frau* (*The Left-Handed Woman*), Kastberger claims, Handke was upset that the final project wasn't able to align with the form he had imagined for it. Feelings of estrangement from both the visual film media and writing led in part to his first trip to Alaska in the winter of 1977. The following summer, Handke returned again with his assistant director. As usual, Handke chronicled his journey in one of his many notebooks and began to pen a first draft of what would become his novel *Langsame Heimkehr* in his New York hotel before his return to Europe (Kastberger 4).

In his review of *Langsame Heimkehr* in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the renowned Austrian literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki portrays Handke as "nun schon seit Jahren in einer Produktionskrise, über die nichts hinwegtäuschen kann."[150] He calls the novel "ein episches Monodrama, das eine radikale Entfremdung zu zeigen versucht. Es geht nur um jenen Sorger"[151] (Reich-Ranicki). When Suhrkamp published the novel in

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[150] "now already in a crisis of production for years that cannot be hidden."
[151] "an epic monodrama that attempts to show a radical alienation. Now it is only about Sorger."

1979, its front and back covers were completely white, with only the title, author's name and publisher. There was no customary synopsis or author profile, and as such the reader began the novel with a detachment similar to Sorger's.

Estrangement from Humans

Sorger's estrangement from humans and form are the main problems that drives the plot forward as he searches for a way to feel connected again and, in the broader sense that the novel's title implies, at home. The protagonist's name, Sorger, already hints at his conflict of estrangement; the word *Sorge* means sorrow or worry and the *–er* suffix designates a person performing that action. Therefore, Sorger is a "worrier," or a person engaged in sorrow, and it is a fitting name for the protagonist. The noun *Sorge* is a "bedrückendes Gefühl innerer Unruhe und Angst, das durch eine unangenehme, schwierige Lage hervorgerufen wird, mit der jmd. belastet ist oder die jmd. in der Zukunft befürchten muss"[152] ("Sorge"). The novel opens with a description of Sorger's inner unrest and his "auf die Augenlider drückendes Bedürfnis nach Heil"[153] (*Langsame* 9). In the German context, *Sorge* also points to a specific connotation tied to the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who considered the word in its other meaning connected to care in his 1927 book *Sein und Zeit*. The connection to Heidegger through Sorger's name, Zorach notes, is one of many Heideggarian traces in the novel and Sorger, "in its manifestation as 'Angst,' appears as 'das Nicht-zuhause-sein'[154]" (182).[155] The abiding

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[152] "oppressive feeling of inner agitation and anxiety with which someone is burdened or which someone must fear in the future that is brought about by an uncomfortable, difficult situation"
[153] "a need for salvation so palpable that it weighed on his eyelids" (3).
[154] "not being at home"
[155] Cf. to the sense of "homelessness" in Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung*.

sense of not being at home in the world, which reflects Sorger's deep estrangement and worry, permeates the novel beyond the title and Sorger continually attempts to work himself back into the world and back to himself.

His estrangement is multifaceted, at once concrete and abstract. In board terms, it has two major dimensions: his estrangement from humans (himself included) and from forms. Looking first at people, there are numerous examples of his failure to connect with those around him. With the exception of Sorger, Lauffer (his colleague and roommate in Alaska) and Esch (the stranger Sorger meets in New York City), no other figures in the novel are named, which establishes distance between them and Sorger (and the reader). Despite living in close quarters with his colleague Lauffer while in Alaska, the two interact more by chance than by choice. Though he does consider Lauffer a friend, this term is heavily qualified as routine politeness; "Lauffer war ein Freund, mit dem die gegenseitige Vertrautheit sich nicht in Kumpanei, sondern in zuweilen fast schüchterner Höflichkeit äußerte"[156] (21).

While in Alaska, Sorger has a romantic relationship with an indigenous woman whom he refers to only as "Die Indianerin,"[157] but even this relationship is superficial and categorized more by Sorger's (and Handke's) fetishized representation of the indigenous woman than verisimilitude, and thus it parallels Handke's representation of the Alaska wilderness and Sorger shows no sadness at having to leave her when he departs (29). Yet another failed connection occurs when Sorger attempts a surprise visit to his former

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[156] "The familiarity between these two friends expressed itself not in chumminess but in a politeness that was almost diffident" (11).
[157] Literally, "the female Indian."

childhood friend who worked in Colorado as a ski instructor, only to find out that the friend had recently passed away. Adding an additional layer of distance, Sorger doesn't hear the information about his friend's death through a friend or colleague, but instead he coincidentally reads his friend's obituary in the newspaper. His alienation from people reaches a climax in the encounter with a neighbor in California. He sees her and her children inside a city bus and waves, but when she looks at him, she fails to recognize Sorger. [158] She "sah ihn, betrachtete ihn sogar bis zu den Schuhen hinunter, erkannte ihn aber nicht"[159] (137). The subtle, cinematic differences between the verbs *sehen* (to see), *betrachten* (to consider, to behold) and *erkennen* (to recognize) exemplify Sorger's detachment. He is physically present, but a cognitive connection with others is missing. With each failed connection, Sorger's estrangement from humans becomes more noticeable, as does his estrangement from himself.

Sorger's separation from home and ostensible desire to return adds to his alienation. This feeling is amplified by frequent references to the large distance that separates him from that destination and a lack of specificity of place. The exact country or region of Sorger's home is never mentioned; the reader only know is that he comes from Europe. Handke often uses the word "Kontinent" instead of Europe, which invokes great geographic proportions while masking the specificity of Sorger's home. His move to the West Coast, accordingly, is called a "Kontinentwechsel"[160] (42).

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[158] Sorger's estrangement from people is closely tied to the motifs of faces and masks, but I will not explore this in detail for the current analysis. For more see Barner and Zorach.
[159] "saw him, looked at him from top to toe, but failed to recognize him" (88).
[160] "change of continents" (25).

Communication and language also connect to this isolation. While in Alaska, Sorger can only communicate with people in Europe through the village's single telephone, which is located in an airplane hangar. The time it takes to make the telephone connection underscores his separation and the language indicates the geographic distances in a (melo)dramatic way: "In dem Moment, bevor es dann auf der endlich für ihn frei gewordenen Leitung weit weg in Übersee klingelte, setzte jedesmal das Satellitenrauschen ein, und damit das Bild der ozeanischen Entfernung"[161] (77). In this description of a phone call, Handke evokes vast distances that emphasize Sorger's separation from his home in a way that exemplifies the angst his name implies. Handke also demonstrates the great distance between Europe and Alaska, as well as the technical difficulties of placing a transatlantic phone call in the 1970s. Moreover, Handke again forgoes place names and refers to Europe only as "weit weg in Übersee."[162] The oceanic separation is both metaphoric and literal; in both cases, the adjective "ozeanisch" points to a great estrangement. The rustling of the satellite amplifies the distance by adding another dimension of cosmic altitude to his separation. When the connection finally does go through, the voice on the other end "schien sich doch im Reden immer mehr zu entfernen"[163] (77). The image of an unopened letter "aus Europa"[164] furthermore signals his isolation and his inability—or unwillingness—to establish connections (38). Later, on his first night back in the West Coast City, he picks up and reads through a pile of letters

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[161] "Just before the line was at last opened to him and he could hear the bell ringing far across the seas, a satellite crackling set in and with it an image of oceanic distances" (49).
[162] "far across the seas" (49).
[163] "seemed to recede farther and father as it spoke" (49).
[164] "from Europe" (22).

that his neighbors had collected while he was away, each a symbol of the communication he lacked while in Alaska. In each example of communicating with people in Europe, the emphasis is far more on the technical difficulties of communication than on a desire for connection. Tellingly, the reader never knows-with whom and what about Sorger speaks.

In addition to his estrangement from humans, Sorger is also estranged from forms. This is the second category of alienation Sorger faces, which manifests itself in numerous, interconnected ways. However vague and abstract the concept of form is, this conflict is the major plot driver. Sorger is "durchdrungen von der Suche nach Formen"[165] (9) and is threatened by a great "Formlosigkiet"—formlessness (16, 90). He expresses the desire to understand himself as "the feeling of form." In the convoluted Heideggerian style Handke plies, the reader learns that what is missing for Sorger is "nicht das Gefühl seiner selbst, sondern das Bewußtsein seiner selbst als Gefühl einer Form"[166] (66). In other words, he needs his consciousness or understanding of self to be the feeling of form. I argue that this desire to feel as a form is linked to seeing oneself as part of the same fabric of the material agencies of the geologic past, though as I hope to show, comprehending and narrating such vast dimensions poses significant challenges for Handke.

Crisis of Form: Language, History, Landscape

Sorger is alienated from three types of forms: the forms of language, of history and of natural formations. Together, these interconnected categories also contribute to his alienation from self because they are all connected to his profession—he is a geologist

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[165] "imbued with the search for forms" (3).
[166] "not the feeling of himself but awareness of himself as the feeling of a form" (42).

who relies on language to comprehend the natural forms whose history he studies. Though his estrangement from form sounds like a paradoxical affliction, his connection to form lies at the center of his occupation and being and is one of the first things the reader learns about Sorger. It is clear that Sorger's sense of self comes from his profession, though not simply because of the job title or rank. Rather, the processes and tasks of his work as a geologist give meaning to his life:

> Seine Erfassung der Erdgestalt, nicht fanatisch betreiben, sondern so inständig, daß er sich selbst dabei allmählich als Eigengestalt mitfühlte, hatte, indem sie ihn vor der mit bloßen Launen und Stimmungen drohenden Großen Formlosigkeit abgrenzte, tatsächlich bis jetzt seine Seele gerettet.[167] (16)

His recognition of self as such through the processes of comprehension (*erfassen*) is the key for his identity because it places emphasis on process and interaction. The mere existence of natural forms as such is not enough; rather, Sorger must comprehend them deeply. The word *Erfassung* illustrates the interaction as it evokes a material connection through the root *fassen*, which means to grasp something and can have a physical connotation.

In this passage, the focus on form is evident through the world play with *Gestalt*, a term that has multiple meanings in German. With a focus in the visual, *Gestalt* can mean the form in which something appears, yet it can also mean guise, indicating that the outward appearance still masks an inner unknown. Other definitions include the creation

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[167] "Indeed, his study of the earth's forms, carried on without fanaticism but so intensely that little by little he gained awareness of his own form in the process, had thus far saved his soul by differentiating him from the Great Formlessness and its dangerous moods and caprices" (7-8).

of a fictional or poetic figure and, in a similar sense, *Gestalt* can also refer to personality. The words *Erdgestalt* (the earth's form) and *Eigengestalt* (his own form) allude to a kinship between Sorger and the forms he studies through the common factor of form or *Gestalt*. Sorger is saturated by his search for forms, "ihrer Unterscheidung und Beschreibung, über die Landschaft hinaus, wo ("im Feld", "im Gelände") diese oft quälende, dann auch wieder belustigende, im Glücksfall triumphierende Tätigkeit sein Beruf war"[168] (9). In these descriptions of Sorger's profession, it again becomes clear that processes connected to his occupation as a geologist such as comprehending, recording and describing natural formations are central to his existence; the focus is on the relationship between Sorger and his surroundings.

Such descriptions of Sorger's work as a geologist, focused as they are on processes and poeticized scientific terminology, exemplify the prose style that would become typical for Handke after *Langsame Heimkehr*. Literary form is inserted through this type of discourse and becomes another key theme in the novel. Indeed, it is first introduced in the book's epigraph, albeit with similar ambiguity to the concept of form in the novel. Establishing form as a central motif in the novel, the epigraph reads, "Dann, als ich kopfüber den Pfad hinunterstolperte, war da plötzlich eine Form"[169] (5). Zorach notes that Handke took the line from the first canto of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, taking liberty with his German translation from an English translation (182). She links Handke's interest in the *Divine Comedy* to "the great narrator" Virgil, which furthermore points to

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[168] "to differentiate and describe them, and not only out of doors ("in the field"), where this often tormenting but sometimes gratifying and at its best triumphant activity was his profession" (3).
[169] "Then, as I stumbled headlong down the path, there was suddenly a form…" (1).

the centrality of narration in the novel (182). Handke grapples with finding a fitting form through the act of writing. Along these lines, *Langsame Heimkehr* is a performative text in which Handke finds his way "home" to his style. Besides the epigraph from Dante, the novel ends with a short poem, which appears in quotation marks and which I will return to at the end of the chapter: "Entschwebendes Gesicht! / Die Steine zu meinen Füßen bringen dich näher: / Mich in sie vertiefend, / beschwere ich uns mit ihnen"[170] (*Langsame* 209). Though the novel begins and ends with poems, Handke remains deeply attached to prose and narrative throughout.

Elsewhere in *Langsame Heimkehr* Handke plays with narrative form with the sudden switch by the narrator from addressing Sorger in third person to second person. This abrupt turn happens at the end of the novel in the penultimate paragraph: "Kurz hattest du, Sorger, die Vorstellung, daß die Geschichte der Menschheit bald vollendet sein würde, harmonisch und ohne Schrecken"[171] (209). Until this switch, the narrator was heterodiegetic and omnipotent, and could have conveyed Sorger's "Vorstellung" (belief, imagination) in the third person. Of the narrative switch at the end, Zorach writes that it functions "to draw the narrator into the text as a palpable partner in discourse" and that "the pretended detachment dissolves; it is as though the narrator were now beginning to address Sorger as a projection of himself" (191). The narrator again addresses Sorger a few lines later, "Im nächtlichen Flugzeug nach Europa war es, als seist du, mein lieber Sorger, auf deiner 'ersten wirklichen Reise', wo man, so wurde gesagt, lerne, 'was der

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[170] "Vanishing face! / The stones at my feet bring you closer: / Immersing myself in them, / I weigh us down with them" (137).
[171] "For a moment it seemed to you, Sorger, that the history of mankind would soon be ended, harmoniously and without horror" (136).

eigenen Stil ist'"[172] (*Langsame* 210). The switch to the second person signals the assertion of the narrator's self, mocking Sorger's existential crisis. Here, the narrator's address of Sorger as "du, mein lieber Sorger"[173] registers as somewhat patronizing and positions the narrator as a more powerful, omniscient one than previously displayed in the novel. The connection between a journey and style hints yet again at the "Heimkehr" as connected to Handke finding grounding in his writing style.

Sorger's estrangement from the form of history manifests itself in numerous ways and deals with both natural and human history. He initially regards the two categories as entirely separate from one another, but he then later establishes that the two are inextricably linked. The focus on natural history is most prominent in the book's first section set in Alaska and called "Die Vorzeitformen."[174] In contrast to *Jetztzeitformen* (forms of the present), *Vorzeitformen* are landforms that developed many years ago in climatic conditions much different from current ones. *Vorzeitformen* correspond to products of past environments that far predate human history and therefore offer an example of storied matter that emerged independent of humans. In other words, humans were entirely absent during the materialization of these prehistoric forms, which can therefore be considered instances of nonhuman, storied matter. The chapter title "Die Vorzeitformen" most likely derives from one of the many geology textbooks in Handke's personal collection. In one, Herbert Wilhelmy's *Geomorphologie in Stichwortern:*

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[172] "In the night plane to Europe it was as though you, my dear Sorger, were taking your 'first real journey,' the journey on which, so it is said, a mean learns 'what his own style is'" (136).
[173] "you, my dear Sorger"
[174] "The Primordial Forms"

Endogene Kräfte, Vorgänge und Formen from 1977, Handke has underlined the definition given for *Vorzeitformen*: "Vorzeitformen reichen als morphologischer Ausdruck vergangener andersartiger Klimate in die Gegenwart hinein, verzahnen sich mit klimabedingten Formen unserer Zeit zu Mosaik fossiler und rezenter Gefügeglieder"[175] (Wilhelmy 22).

On the back cover page of Handke's notebook dated from August 31 to October 18, 1978, Handke scribbled (upside-down) the terminology of different geologic formations, to create his own glossary. He lists, "Arbeitsformen, Ruheformen / Jetztzeitformen: Gesamtheit der aus gegenwärtigen Umweltverhältnissen erklärbaren Formen / Vorzeitformen: können sich doch in Umgestaltung = Zerstörung befinden / Mehrzeitformen: enge Verordnung an Jetzt- und Vorzeitformen"[176] (Notebook 17, DLA Marbach). Handke's lexicon of natural formations parallels Sorger's obsession with the emergence and development of natural forms. Moreover, the names of these different land formations poetically evoke multiple and vast temporalities that seem to captivate Handke. The three categories Handke lists in his notebook mirror the different temporalities in the novel, providing, in a sense, temporal guideposts. The focus on land formations from the deep past positions Handke to explore nonhuman changes in the novel (*die Vorzeitformen*—primordial forms), while his focus remains on the protagonist

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[175] "Primordial forms extend into the present as morphological expressions of past, different climates, interlocking with climatically determined forms of our time to from a mosaic of fossilized and extant structural elements."
[176] "Working forms, resting forms / Forms of the present: totality of forms that can be explained by from current environmental conditions / Primordial forms: can still be found in transformation = destruction / Forms of multiple periods: close order of forms of the present and primordial forms."

Sorger (*die Jetztzeitformen*—forms of the present). As a whole, the novel coordinates with the model of *Mehrzeitformen*—forms of multiple periods—by combining elements of the prehistoric past and current conditions. As a model, *Mehrzeitformen* anticipate Dipesh Chakrabarty's framing of the concept of Anthropocene in which the long-standing divide between human and natural history is collapsed ("The Climate of History" 201).

Handke explores these varying modes of human and natural history throughout the novel. While studying forms of the deep past, Sorger is still confronted with and haunted by the more recent past of the 20th century and the brutal violence of the Holocaust, thus some scholars read Sorger's time in Alaska as an attempt to escape from his historical guilt. Alaska is presented as ahistorical—absent of human history—through Handke's framing of the area as wilderness. Sorger's observations in Alaska crystalize around the conception of an ahistorical wilderness devoid of people, though this idea is also constantly undermined by Sorger himself. One of the first descriptions of the Alaskan village presents an uninhabited landscape from Sorger's point of view from the vantage point of standing on a clay platform; it's described both as "menschenleer glänzend" and "wohl punkthaft besiedelt"[177] (10).[178]

Zorach notes that the erasure of history in Alaska comes partly from Sorger's perception of the time as "ständige Gegenwart"[179] (52). She writes: "Although Sorger

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[177] Literally, "shining in its absence of people" and "no doubt sparsely populated."
[178] The representation of Alaska as wilderness in *Langsame Heimkehr* maps onto to William Cronon's critique of the concept of wilderness that erases history and ignores indigenous people on in areas framed as "wilderness" and therefore outside the realm of human influence.
[179] "constant present" (32).

here can perceive the various traces of past and continuing geological development, he experiences the human community as an isolated fragment of humanity existing in a present which knows no history" (184). Similarly, Buchholz writes that the area is "imagined in the novel as a colonized wilderness that does not properly belong to Western history" (34), concluding that this imagined separation allows for distance from the historical guilt Sorger feels related to the Holocaust. Braungart calls attention to the novel's first sentence (it is one that he and many others pinpoint as frustratingly obtuse) and how it moves toward "das schwergewichtige Wort"[180] at the end: *Heil*. The first sentence reads: "Sorger hatte schon einige ihm nahgekommene Menschen überlebt und empfand keine Sehnsucht mehr, doch oft eine selbstlose Daseinslust und zuzeiten ein animalisch gewordenes, auf die Augenlider drückendes Bedürfnis nach Heil"[181] (9). Sorger's need for healing is what drives the novel forward and drives Sorger toward home; the word *Heil* indicates that part of what needs to be healed is the recent past. In one of his notebooks from 1979, he writes, "Mit „Langsamen Heimkehr" habe ich mich (und meine Vorfahren, „mein Volk") gereinigt durch Form"[182] (Notebook 20, page 80, DLA Marbach). This remark stands out in his notebooks, which otherwise contain mostly comments and corrections for his writing and rarely contain remarks in first-person like this one.

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[180] "the heavy-weighted word"
[181] "Sorger had outlived several of those who had become close to him; he had ceased to long for anything, but often felt a selfless love of existence and at times a need for salvation so palpable that it weighed on his eyelid" (3).
[182] "With 'Langsame Heimkehr' I purified myself (and my ancestors, "my people") through form."

Sorger's historical guilt about the 20th century connects one unit of human time that is large in terms of individual lifetimes, but not impossible to comprehend or experience—a century—with much larger scales of geologic history. His meditation on human history swings between scales of time and space as he attempts to find his place in history and figure out an appropriate response:

> …er saß weit hinten in den niedrigen, leeren "Hallen der Kontinente" und in der "Nacht des Jahrhunderts" als einer, der dabei war, sich und seinesgleichen mit dem verfluchten Jahrhundert zumindest zu beweinen—und dem dies zugleich untersagt wurde, weil er 'selber schuld' sei. Ja, nicht einmal ein 'Opfer' war er und konnte so auch nicht mit den Opfern dieses Jahrhunderts sich zur Großen Klage zusammenfinden und in der Verzückung gemeinsam Leidens wieder stimmhaft werden. Er…war…ein Nachkomme von Tätern, und sah sich selber als Täter; und die Völkermörder seines Jahrhunderts als Ahnherren.[183] (103)

This passage shows Sorger's struggle with coming to terms with the past—*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—and, specifically, the difficulty he experiences in mourning the atrocities of the Holocaust when he wasn't directly affected by it. He sees himself as a descendent, "ein Nachkomme," of perpetrators and feels that his relation to the perpetrators prevent him from being a victim, though it is unclear to the reader what

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[183] "…sitting in the 'night of the century,' far back in the low, empty 'lobbies of continents,' he at least was mourning for himself and his fellow men and this accursed century—and yet he was forbidden to mourn, because he 'himself was to blame.' In truth, he was not even a 'victim' and therefore could not join in the Great Lament with other victims of this century and find his voice again in the ecstasy of common suffering. …he was descended from murderers, he regarded himself as a murderer, and the mass murderers of his century as ancestors" (65).

exactly his relation is. Being able to share in grief with others could also bring him closer to people and mend his estrangement, but he excludes himself from that possibility.

His isolation while in the US, due partly to having to speak a different language, and the dramatic landscapes he encounters repeatedly reinforces his distance from Europe and, with that, his guilt. At night Sorger experiences "immer noch die Entfernung von Europa und 'den Vorfahren': nicht nur als die unvorstellbare Wegstrecke zwischen sich und einem anderen Punkt, sondern auch sich selber als einen Entfernten (wobei allein der Tatbestand der Entfernung schon Schuld war)"[184] (42). His physical distance and separation from Europe only amplify his feelings of historical guilt, since he also feels guilty for leaving his home. Despite wanting to feel distance from his historical guilt, Sorger's separation from Europe ultimately adds to his estrangement. The play on words between "die Entfernung" (the distance/removal) and "einen Entfernten" (a distant one/a removed one) demonstrates the significant degree to which Sorger internalizes his separation; he does not simply experience distance, he embodies it.

In attempting to place himself and human history into the greater scale of geologic time, Sorger desires to abandon his own century: "Kein Blut mehr, kein Herzschlag mehr, keine Menschenzeit mehr… Kein Jahrhundert mehr, nur die Jahreszeit"[185] (64). The difference in the timescales of natural history and human history serves Sorger in his attempt to escape the violence of human history and the similarity of

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[184] "his remoteness from Europe and his 'forebears.' What he perceived then was not the unthinkable distance between himself and another point but himself as a distant one (guilty of being far away)" (25).
[185] "No more blood, no more heartbeat, no more human time… No more century, only this season" (40).

the words “Jahrhundert” (century) and “Jahreszeit” (season) hints at the possibility of inhabiting a different historical mode. Handke again juxtaposes human and natural history, with human history represented with images of life; blood and heartbeat, both which can also signal death and violence (*Herzschlag* means both heartbeat and heart attack). Natural history, in this case, is represented by seasons—a repetitive cycle that sustains life and guarantees returns. These two historical modes correspond to what Stephen Jay Gould describes as the dichotomy of temporal metaphors used to understand the passage of time. On the one hand there is “time’s arrow,” in which history is conceived of as “an irreversible sequence of unrepeatable events” (10). This linear progression of history always moves further into the future. On the other is “time’s cycle,” in which “events have no meaning as distinct episodes with causal impact upon a contingent history” (11). Together, these two concepts of temporality informed post-Enlightenment Western thought and helped to shape the way early geologists understood the earth’s formation. Sorger’s focus on ancestry in determining himself as guilty engages with both temporalities. As a descendant of perpetrators (time’s arrow), he feels guilty for the genocide of his century. Yet at the same time, the cyclical temporality of natural time (time’s cycle), “die Jahreszeit” (the season), signifies new beginnings and a departure from the buildup of human history.

Although Sorger wishes to replace the century with a season, it is important to highlight the role human violence plays in *Langsame Heimkehr*, especially in terms of my larger project of geologic narration, where details of human history risk being overlooked. Despite the unfathomably large scales of time and space presented in the novel, the Holocaust still underlies the text. This paradox resonates with Rob Nixon’s

concept of slow violence, "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (*Slow Violence* 2). By means of this paradox, Handke opens up the timescale of deep history to make such slow violence visible.

Michael Butler places Handke (and Max Frisch) on the "neutral periphery" with regard to German history and argues that they, as Austrian and Swiss authors, engage with themes in the postwar era from a distinct position in contrast to authors writing in Germany (232). Though they share similar literary traditions, Butler continues, "…it can be argued that neither country suffered the savage political, economic and human caesura that was the fate of Germany and which led to the creation of two mutually hostile Germanys and two very different ideological versions of the past" (233). Still, it is clear that Sorger struggles to come to terms with 20th century history and his inescapable connection to the Holocaust through his European heritage and the German language. Apart from the indigenous woman in Alaska, the people Sorger interacts with are all fellow Europeans who share his language—Lauffer, the neighbors, his old school friend in Colorado, and Esch in New York City.

Language, therefore, adds to Sorger's estrangement and distance from his European home. Additionally, language is the means Sorger has to grasp natural history. As a geologist, Sorger carefully studies natural history through the landforms around him and the novel is filled with descriptions landscapes in Alaska, the West Coast, Colorado and even in New York City. From an ecocritical standpoint it's important to note that Handke does not limit his interest in the nonhuman environment to Alaska, even when Sorger's journey moves him from a remote and sparsely populated area toward the

"Weltstadt."[186] Of course, the focus on the nonhuman environment is far more present in the book's first chapter, "Die Vorzeitformen," but there are a number of significant environmental descriptions of New York City's urban landscape that reflect a notion of the environment that isn't restricted to perceived pristine landscapes. For example, New York is where "…die Häuser erschienen so der Landschaft nicht mehr bloß aufgesetzt, sondern mit ihr verbunden: als sei die Felseninsel tatsächlich 'die Heimat der Wolkenkratzer'"[187] (180). The phrase "die Heimat der Wolkenkratzer"[188] suggests that these buildings exist harmoniously with their surroundings, as if they had grown there. Focusing on physical features instead of its people, New York is referred to as a "Felseninsel" (rock/cliff island).

Sorger also notices how the floor of the coffee shop "ahmte die Oberflächengestalt der Erde nach"[189] (179). The use of the verb *nachahmen* (to mimic) indicates that the similarity comes from the substance itself and is not simply a matter of Sorger's perception, in which case the verbs *ähneln* or *gleichen* (to resemble, to look like) would have been more fitting. When the reader learns about Sorger's deep connection to his work as a geologist, it also becomes clear that the methods and processes with which he interacts with the world around him are not limited to nonhuman, 'natural' environments. The narrator explains how "Sorger brauchte die Natur, jedoch nicht nur als

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[186] "World city"
[187] "…the buildings no longer seemed to have been plunked down in the landscape, they had become an integral part of it, as though the skyscrapers were really at home on this rocky island" (116).
[188] "the home of skyscrapers"
[189] "imitated the surface of the earth" (116).

das 'Natur'-Belassene…"[190] and goes on to give examples of other environments that give him "lebensnotwendiger Atemraum (und damit Selbstvertrauen)"[191] (13-14). This includes observing barely perceptible slopes on the streets and imagining himself traveling through the interior of a skyscraper and observing all the different floors.

As a geologist, Sorger has the ability to comprehend timescales that could otherwise be alienating in their magnitude, and Handke makes these timescales (somewhat) accessible through his expressive prose. We see this, for example, in descriptions of features in the landscape like an ice cone, an *Eiskegel*, "… der sich als Blase vor tausend Jahren aufgewölbt hatte, und mit Sand und Schotter bedeck, von außen gar nicht als Eisstück zu erkennen war"[192] (33). The detailed descriptions of the surrounding environment both help to create the novel's storyworld as well as to conceptualize the scale of geologic change. However, Handke's poetic prose often buries the deep time scale and the material changes that occur. Sorger pictures himself not as "ein Wissenschaftler"[193] but rather "höchstens (manchmal) ein gewissenhafter Landschaftsdarsteller"[194] (114). His own framing as a "Landschaftsdarsteller" (describer of landscapes) indicates what I understand to be the main question that preoccupies Handke: how is it possible to represent nonhuman environments and nonhuman material changes in writing? Unsurprisingly, both Handke and Sorger struggle with their representation.

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[190] "Sorger needed nature, but not only in its 'unspoiled' state" (6).
[191] "the breathing space (and hence self-confidence) indispensable to life' (6).
[192] "…that had formed a thousand years before but could not be recognized as ice under its sheathing of sand and gravel" (19).
[193] "a scientist" (73).
[194] "at most (occasionally) as a conscientious describer of landscapes" (73).

Questions of representation have long since been connected to geology, and from its beginnings as a discipline, geology has always been literary. Scholars Virginia Zimmerman and Adelene Buckland, for example, research the connections between founders of geology—including James Hutton and Charles Lyell—and literary practices in England at the time of their research. These early geologists relied on familiar literary devices such as metaphor and analogy to conceptualize their theories of the past, based on their observations of the earth's natural formations. Indeed, they sought to record and transmit this information to a wider public. Narrative practices played an essential role for the early geologists who found themselves with the task of "creating" a past that was previously misunderstood or unknown to humans, through "reading" the Earth's history as recorded in rock layers, fossils, bones, etc., and then writing this history, and their new field, into existence. In these first years, Buckland writes, "doing geology meant writing it, too" (*Novel* 13).

In *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology*, Buckland argues that literature had a significant impact on the scientific practice of the emerging geologists, not just as a means of representation but as an essential tool for helping them craft theories to explain the formations they studied. She writes that geologists "established new *literary* forms by which they would explain, interpret, order, describe, argue about, and bring into existence a science whose claims and insights were both complex and new" (original emphasis, 2). This endeavor was not only representational, but also an integral part of their scientific practice. Narrative in particular played an important role for both understanding new geologic discoveries and for spreading this knowledge within and beyond scientific communities, it "was a

powerful tool for geological writers, who generated literary 'sensations' around the telling of geological stories and borrowed devices and patterns from novels, plays, history and poetry to give order and meaning to the complex worlds they encountered beneath the soil" (14). Buckland frames the early geologists and their work as romantic, in a sense that evokes exploring untouched and unexplored places. Her model of the work of Victorian geologists reveals a concern with form strikingly similar to Sorger's in *Langsame Heimkehr*: "Studying the structures and forms of the natural world with unprecedented success, and grappling for the material, visual, and verbal forms by which to instantiate them, their repudiation of 'romance' was a symptom of this struggle to formalize the geological past and to analyze the forms of the land with which they were confronted" (17). She writes that "…problems in literary form were often used as a conceptual tool for thinking through the problems of geological form" (17), whereas for Handke, Sorger's study of geologic forms was a way for the author to develop his "true" style. Zimmerman, on the other hand, writes that the evidence geologists found "revealed at once the extraordinary depth of time and the awesome ability of the writer to measure time and to craft its story" (*Excavating* 2). Yet telling the story of the earth was only possible from the present position of the geologist, which "privileges the present and thus diminishes the alarming implications of the abyss that is the past" (3). While Zimmerman refers to the potential of the deep past to be overwhelming for Victorian writers (and the potential for this to lead to nihilism), it can also be argued that the privileging of the present additionally hides the severity of the future implications and consequence of humans' current actions.

Handke's depiction of Sorger's work as a geologist presents parallels to the work of the early geologists and raises similar questions of representation that we can now approach with contemporary theories of environmental understanding and ecocritical analysis. Handke writes that Sorger was certain of his occupation, which he describes as "…mit den verfügbaren Methoden in der Landschaft zu lesen und das Gelesene in einer strengen Ordnung weiterzugeben"[195] (16). The work of the geologist is to transform the strangeness of landscape into a textual form accessible to others, which usually occurs through writing. As a geologist Sorger *reads* the landscape, which here is reduced to "das Gelesene"—that which is read. Without this work, the passage continues, Sorger's life would be meaningless. The inextricable connection between Sorger and his geological practice leads to his existential estrangement. To read the earth's primeval forms is to uncover the material entanglements of the deep past.

This framing of geology parallels Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's framing of material ecocriticism as an investigation of "storied matter." For example, Iovino writes that, "…networks of agencies manifest themselves in forms that can be read as narratives" ("Living Diffractions" 76). The geologist must do precisely that—read the narratives written in the earth's history. Elsewhere Iovino writes that "material ecocriticism takes matter as a text, as a site of narrativity, a storied matter, a corporeal palimpsest in which stories are inscribed" ("Stories" 451). Within this framework, the geologist becomes the reader of storied matter of the deep past. Sorger is a chronicler of the *Vorzeitformen* of natural history and his crisis of language, which I will examine in

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[195] "to read the landscape with the available means and give an orderly account of this reading" (8).

the next section, is linked to the difficulty of finding the language to describe such natural formations.

Material Agencies and Language

Many scholars consider *Langsame Heimkehr* as a turning point in Handke's writing when he first develops his style of maximalist prose. It is unsurprising, then, that this form of language features prominently in Sorger's estrangement from form. Though language is closely linked to his work as a geologist, his struggle to put geologic changes of the deep past into writing mirrors more general concerns about representation directly linked to material ecocriticism. Narrating nonhuman agency challenges the basic frameworks and assumptions of literary writing, by shifting the focus away from human protagonists and subjects toward nonhuman ones. The focus on nonhuman changes in Handke's prose runs the risk of becoming masked as solely descriptions of the nonhuman world, but through careful analysis, we can see Handke's decisive focus on material agency emerge. While scholars in the environmental humanities and ecocriticism have only recently begun to grapple with nonhuman agency (and more specifically, questions concerning the manifestation and representation of such agencies), geologists have long since been aware of the diverse forces that make up the nonhuman environment. When Handke studied geology textbooks before and during his trip to Alaska,[196] he filled the

[196] The textbooks (Herbert Wilhelmy's *Geomorphologie in Stichworten* and Hartmut Leser's *Geomorphologie II*) Handke studied are housed at the Literaturarchiv der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. On the inside cover Wilhelmy's *Geomorphologie in Stichworten* there is a handwritten list of hotels in New Work and their addresses, indicating that Handke had the book with him on his trip to Alaska.

pages with marking and notes, indicating his intense engagement with the material. By examining the content of these reference books, we can form an idea of how Handke understood the nonhuman world and how this influenced *Langsame Heimkehr*.

Hartmut Leser's *Geomorphologie II: Praktische Arbeitswesen* (*Geomorphology II: Practical Methods*), published in 1968 is part of the series "Das Geographische Seminar" ("The Geographic Seminar).[197] True to the subtitle, Leser provides a practical guide to geological fieldwork, including descriptions of the proper gear needed in the field and a list of special considerations concerning the role of the geologist. His list entitled "Ausrüstungsgegenstände des Geomorphologen"[198] includes various measuring tools (compass, thermometer, pH-meters), equipment (magnifying glass, binoculars, pocket knife) along with maps, backpacks and bags for collecting samples (Leser 9). Perhaps the most important item for the geologist in the field is the *Feldbuch* (field notebook) and Leser devotes an entire section—nearly two full pages—to the *Feldbuch*, describing its significance and giving detailed specifications about the preferred size, shape and construction of the notebook. Handke's underlinings and markings in this section show his absorption with such details, many of which appear in *Langsame Heimkehr* as Sorger observes and sketches "his" landscapes in Alaska. Leser labels the *Feldbuch* the most important object in the field: "Hier werden alle Beobachtungen, Gedanken und Skizzen eingetragen, die mit der Geländearbeit in Verbindung stehen. Grundsatz muss sein, *jede* Beobachtung schriftlich oder zeichnerisch zu fixieren. Die

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[197] The poetic name of the geologist "Leser" (the reader) is not lost on me and, though I haven't found any definitive proof to date, the name could have easily inspired Handke's Sorger.
[198] "the geomorphologist's equipment."

Hoffnung, sich später an dieses oder jenes zu erinnern, wird sich nicht erfüllen"[199] (22, original emphasis). Much of Sorger's work is concerned with such observations and sketches as well.

In addition, Leser's textbook provides an instructive overview of the geologic forces that make up the landscape in a matter-of-fact way that highlights the nonhuman. Of the composition of the earth, for example, he writes: "Der Boden ist bekanntlich die Summe einer Anzahl Faktoren: Gestein, Klima, Lebewelt, und Zeit"[200] (8). In Handke's personal copy, the author has highlighted each of the four factors with a backslash. Among the four factors—the stones, climate, the living world, and time—humans would be included in the *Lebewelt* category, which refers to the "Gesamtheit des pflanzlichen, tierischen Lebens"[201] ("Lebewelt"). Leser's description of the earth's makeup frames it as a complex mixture of forces and not simply a given, static backdrop. It also suggests a concept that has now been accepted in the Anthropocene era—that humans have a profound impact on the earth, including on a geomorphological level. With regard to contemporary environmental discussions surrounding the Anthropocene, it is important to keep in mind that the term Anthropocene was first proposed in 2000. In a short article in the *Global Change Newsletter*, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer write that "mankind's activities gradually grew into a significant geological, morphological force" and propose the term Anthropocene to signify a new geologic era marked by the profound influence of

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[199] "All observations, thoughts and sketches that are connected to field work are registered here. It is imperative that *each* observation be noted by writing or by drawing. The hope of remembering one or the other later will not be fulfilled."
[200] "The earth's soil is known to be the sum of a number of factors: stones, climate, the living world and time."
[201] "The entirety of plant and animal life."

humans. Crutzen and Stoermer, however, acknowledge that human influence on this scale has been noted by scientists as far back as the 19th century and Leser's inclusion of *Lebewelt* as a contributing factor to the earth's makeup is evidence of this.

Leser also dedicates a part of his textbook to "Anthropogene Formen"[202] and the markings around it in Handke's copy indicate that he intensively studied this section. A footnote linked to the section header clarifies the meaning of the word *anthropogene*: "greich. Anthropos = Mensch"[203] (Leser 167). He explains, "Durch beabsichtigte und unbeabsichtigte, bewußte und unbewußte Eingriffe ist der Mensch seit frühesten geschichtlichen Zeiten an Veränderung der Oberflächenformen der Erde beteiligt"[204] (167). While this description is restricted to considering humans' influence on the surface of the earth and doesn't consider changes to climate, weather patterns and other systems, it still registers that humans are a force of change on a global scale that significantly alter the planet. Leser, for example, lists soil erosion to illustrate human anthropogenic forms. With these remarks I do not mean to suggest that Handke wrote *Langsame Heimkehr* with the idea of the Anthropocene *avant la lettre* in mind. Rather, I want to highlight the

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[202] "anthropogenic forms"
[203] "Greek Anthropos = human"
[204] "Since the earliest historic times, humans have been taking part in changing the surface of the earth through intentional and unintentional, conscious and unconscious interventions."

intersection of the field of geology's understanding of human impact on the environment and Handke's enthusiastic study of the same topic.[205]

Handke's deep fascination and research into geology is palpable throughout the novel. The description of an "äolisches Brausen im Kopf von dem Wind aus der Vorzeit,"[206] for example, is an impressive metaphor for the dizzying unease Sorger feels in his alienation, but it can also be understood in terms of how it brings the geologic past to the present and also highlights human and nonhuman intra-action (*Langsame* 34). The rarely used adjective "äolisch" has a double meaning; it refers to things from the Italian Aeolian islands north of Sicily and also to a geologic phenomenon in which land is shaped by wind carrying particles that are then deposited elsewhere. Such deposits make up ten percent of the earth's surface and can be found in parts of China, Argentina and, of course, Alaska (Lancaster 3). Sorger's colleague Lauffer is a "Hangforscher" (slope researcher) and over a page of the novel is devoted to a description of this particular work, for which he sets up "Sandfallen-Flaschen"[207] in order to measure the movement of

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[205]The amount of markings in his geomorphology textbooks and the different color pens used suggest that Handke spent hours reading and studying geology. Combing his research with his two trips to Alaska, it is tempting to call his interest in geology obsessive. Such a framing brings to mind how Handke describes Sorger's close connection with his work as a geologist as saving his soul: "Seine Erfassung der Erdgestalt, nicht fanatisch betreiben, sondern so inständig, daß er sich selbst dabei allmählich als Eigengestalt mitfühlte, hatte, indem sie ihn vor der mit bloßen Launen und Stimmungen drohenden Großen Formlosigkeit abgrenzte, tatsächlich bis jetzt seine Seele gerettet" (16) ("Indeed, his study of the earth's forms, carried on without fanaticism but so intensely that little by little he gained awareness of his own form in the process, had thus far saved his soul by differentiating him from the Great Formlessness and its dangerous moods and caprices" (7-8)). The narrator attempts to distance Sorger's fervor from fanaticism, which may also be a self-defense mechanism for Handke.

[206] "the primeval wind… set up an Aeolian roaring in his head" (20).

[207] "sand traps" (38).

such sand deposits (*Langsame* 61).[208] The narrator details how Lauffer sets up various pieces of equipment to measure the amount of sand carried by the wind. Such descriptions display Handke's interest in nonhuman forces and reflect the extensive amount of research he did on the topic.

A striking number of passages in *Langsame Heimkehr* address the material world around the protagonist, although the exceedingly detailed prose often masks the focus on nonhuman agency. In the following example, which is typical for the author, Handke employs poetic metaphors and lyrical prose as Sorger acknowledges the multitude of forces at play around him:

> Dazu gehörte auch die Augenblicksvorstellung, daß gleichzeitig mit den über die Landschaft treibenden Pappelsamen auf dem Boden der Stromrinne gerade im Vorborgenen die Schotterkugeln dahinglitten, sich rollend überschlugen oder sogar langsame Bogensprünge vollführten, eingehüllt in Schlammwolken und weiterbefördert von natürlichen Wasserwalzen, welche – tief unter der stillen Oberfläche in der Gegenrichtung rotierend – er sich nicht denken, sondern miterleben konnte.[209] (12)

The still surface of a river that most people observe is contrasted with the movement and energy underneath, and unpacking the complicated sentence reveals Handke's attention to the vibrant nonhuman surroundings. While poplar seeds drifts over the land,

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[208] Descriptions of such traps and how to make them are in the textbook *Geomorphologie II* Hartmut Leser that Handke studied before his trip, pp. 61-62.

[209] "This state of mind was also favored by the fleeting thought that while poplar seeds were drifting through the air, the pebbles on the riverbed were at the same time shifting unseen, rolling or slowly leaping over one another, enveloped in clouds of mud and propelled by waves deep below the surface which he could sense rather than infer" (5).

"Schotterkugeln"—small bits of broken rock—secretly ("im Verborgenen") glide under the water on the bed of the river. The "Schotterkugeln" are the subject of the clause and are connected to the verbs *sich überschlagen* (to flip/roll over) and *vollführen* (to perform/execute, especially in the sense of a feat), both which convey agency and movement. With the compound words "Schlammwolken" (mud clouds) and "Wasserwalzen" (water rolls) Handke elevates the description to poetic discourse while still emphasizing agency. These dimensions are especially apparent in the case of the "Wasserwalzen," where *walzen* refers to the flattening mechanism of a road roller (similar to a steam roller) as well as to the waltz dance, yielding double meanings that both suggest movement; the "natürlich[e] Wasserwalzen" ("natural water rolls") move the pebbles along and flow against the current. The movement of the mud and small pebbles calls to mind the capacity of sand, silt and mud to create new landscapes. Finally, the last clause of the sentence ("…Wasserwalzen, welche – tief unter der stillen Oberfläche in der Gegenrichtung rotierend – er sich nicht denken, sondern miterleben konnte") signals that Sorger isn't an observer, but rather a part of this life and movement. This synthesis exemplifies the concept of intra-action between humans and nonhumans.

Shifting deposits and erosion are both factors in the main geologic feature Sorger is drawn to—the meandering river, which is an instance of nonhuman, material, change over a long span of time. While the image of a meandering stream presents a fitting metaphor for Sorger's journey home filled with detours, the attention to details of the meandering river makes clear that Handke is interested in the geologic changes of the river. Such winding rivers are formed over hundreds of thousands of years when the current slowly erodes a river's bank on one side and deposits that material on the other

side. Over extremely long periods of time, this sedimentation can create a distinct winding, serpentine shape. Due to the curved shape, water flows faster on the outer bank, causing more and more sediment to erode. On the inner bank, by contrast, the water flows more slowly and deposits sediment that builds up. Over time, a meander can be cut off from the river's stream altogether through these processes of erosion and sedimentation, creating what is called an oxbow lake ("Meandering Stream").

The first description of Sorger's Alaskan home focuses precisely on the vast expanse of the winding river:

> An dessen Lehmsockel—er hätte hinabspringen können—begann der ungeheure Bereich des zum gesamten Horizontrund wegfliehenden, menschenleer glänzenden, den Kontinentschild von Ost nach West durchflutenden und zugleich stetig in dem wohl punkthaft besiedelten, doch eigentlich unbewohnten Tiefland nach Nord und Süd mäandernden Stroms…[210] (10)

Given the detailed and grammatically packed description, it is unclear, at first, that the subject of the sentence is the river—"der ungeheure Bereich des… Stroms." The river is described not as a *Fluss* but as a *Strom*, which highlights its dynamic properties; *Strom* means flow or current and focuses the reader on the power and movement of the river that creates its meandering form. The area of the river is "ungeheur," meaning enormous

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[210] "A clay platform so low that he could have jumped off. There began the immense realm of the glittering river, extending to the whole circle of the horizon, flooding the continental shelf from east to west and at the same time meandering northward and southward through the sparsely settled but to all intents and purposes uninhabited lowlands" (4).

or, indeed, monstrous,[211] and it spreads out in all of the cardinal directions before filling the entire horizon. The word *Kontinentschild* again evokes the vastness, and along with it the distance between the European and American continents that also contributes to Sorger's estrangement. The "Phänomen der Mäanderbiegungen,"[212] as Handke later refers to it, unsettles the flow of the river (10). Usually a river would flow from East to West and, as the current erodes the land around it, also expands out north- and southward. The descriptions of the river continue, and as the narrator notes, the river "strömte freilich unfixierbar schnell,"[213] so quickly that its speed is hard to determine (11).

What is furthermore striking about this passage is that it presents a panoramic bird's eye view of vast dimensions that spread to the horizon, but Sorger, the narrator writes, stands on a clay structure from which he could jump—"er hätte hinabspringen können"—suggesting that Sorger's estrangement could possibly lead to thoughts of suicide (10).[214] Later in the chapter there are descriptions of flights Sorger took in the area, so it is conceivable that an aerial view is familiar to him. The day before his planned departure, the reader learns, he and Lauffer decide to spend the day together doing aerial photography (73). The next day, Sorger plans to fly to California with the postal airplane, but they are forest to turn around due to bad weather. On Handke's first trip to Alaska in 1977 with his friend Friedhelm C. Maye, the two drove from Anchorage to Fairbanks and

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[211] Cf. Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* in which the figure of the "Gärtner" is called "nicht ganz geheuer."
[212] Literally, "phenomenon of the meander curves."
[213] "flowed at a speed hard to estimate" (4).
[214] Handke's mother Maria died by suicide in 1971 and Handke describes their relationship and her death in *Wunschloses Unglück* (*A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*), published in 1972.

then further north to a town called Circle located on the Yukon river ("Fotos zur 1. Alaska Reise"). On their way back to Anchorage, they were in a car accident and had to be flown back to Fairbanks in the postal airplane. The Literaturarchiv der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek holds the polaroid photos Handke and Maye took on the trip: one is taken from inside of an airplane and below a meandering river is visible in the background.[215] Clearly, Handke had witnessed such an aerial view of a meandering river in Alaska first-hand.

A number of additional passages focus on material changes of the deep past as well, highlighting the closeness Sorger experiences with the forms he studies. While in Alaska, the narrator remarks that Sorger was "beflügelt von der Vorstellung, daß diese Wildnis vor ihm durch die Monate der Beobachtung, in der (annähernden) Erfahrung ihrer Formen und deren Entstehung, zu seiner höchstpersönlichen Raum geworden war"[216] (11). In this passage, it is clear that Sorger is interested in both the *form* of the landscapes and their *formation* ("ihrer Formen und deren Entstehung"), indicating that the forces and processes that went into making these forms so long ago are part and parcel of the end result that can be seen by the viewer. Moreover, the parenthetical remark "annähernden" (approximately) suggests that Sorger does not consider the possibility of entirely understanding the natural formations. This elaboration

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[215] Photo 179, Literaturarchiv der Österreichsichen Nationalbibliothek (ÖLA/SPH/LW/S1).
[216] "buoyed by the thought that the months he had spent observing this wilderness, learning (approximately) its forms and their genesis, had made it his own private domain" (5).

demonstrates an awareness of the limitations of human understanding and an appreciation for the complexities of nonhuman formations.

The passage continues, explaining why Sorger felt like the landscape had become part of him. Its focus on the dynamic processes that make up the landscape is further underscored, albeit hidden in Handke's complex prose:

> …indem ihm [Sorger] die verschiedenen an dem Landschaftsbild beteiligten Kräfte, ohne daß er sie in der Vorstellung erst herbeibemühen mußte, schon im bloßen Wahrnehmungsvorgang, zugleich mit dem Erfassen des großen Wassers, dessen Strömens, dessen Wirbel und Schnellen, gegenwärtig waren, wirkten sie, mochten sie in der Außenwelt einst auch zerstörerisch gewesen sein (und die Zerstörung immer noch fortsetzen), durch ihre Gesetze zu einer guten Innenkraft verwandelt, stärkend, beruhigend auf ihn.[217] (11-12)

Parsing this complex sentence reveals the significance of the material realm and a careful framing of the environment as a dynamic constellation of nonhuman forces. The subject of the sentence, "die verschiedenen an dem Landschaftsbild beteiligten Kräfte,"[218] is mentioned four times and signals a focus on material agencies by qualifying *Kräfte* (forces, powers) as those that make up the landscape. Furthermore, *Kräfte*—the plural of *Kraft*—necessarily indicates agency as its definition is "Sache oder Person, die eine

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[217] "Destructive as they may have been (and still were) in the objective world, the forces that went to make up this landscape, in becoming present to him along with the great flowing water, its eddies and rapids, without mental effort, through the perceptive process alone, were transformed by their own laws into a benign inner force, which calmed him and gave him strength" (5).

[218] "the forces that went to make up this landscape" (5).

Wirkung ausübt"[219] ("Kraft"). These forces have the capacity to be both destructive and calming—a tension that is reflected overall in the novel.

Though destructive in the *Außenwelt*, such forces have a calming effect on Sorger, "[sie] wirkten… stärkend, beruhigend auf ihn"[220] (12). The calmness appears to come from taking in the scene around him, including "the great water" of the river. The river is again shown as dynamic with the words *Strömen* (flow), *Wirbel* (whirl) and *Schnellen* (dart). Moreover, the very qualities of the river become "gegenwärtig"—present—to Sorger, and as such relocate the material agency intrinsic to the river from the deep past to the present moment of perception. The parenthetical remark "und die Zerstörung immer noch fortsetzen"[221] functions to position the material agency in the present in this way and shows nature as a process. Most of all, Sorger is comforted by the *Gesetze* of the forces, foreshadowing the *Gesetz* he writes for himself at the novel's end that resolves his crisis of form.

Sorger struggles to find the language adequate to grasp these forms and the moment of their origin in the deep past. Convinced by his science, he nevertheless points to the absurdity of using language to approach and understand geologic structures. The narrator explains how the "Sprachformeln seiner Wissenschaft"[222] appeared to him as fraudulent:

> …ihre Riten der Landschaftserfassung, ihre Beschreibungs- und Benennungsübereinkünfte, ihre Vorstellung der Zeit und der Räume, kamen ihm

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[219] "Thing or person that causes an effect."
[220] "which calmed him and gave him strength" (5).
[221] Literally, "and still continuing the destruction."
[222] "linguistic formulas of his science" (9).

> fragwürdig vor: daß es in einer Sprache, welche sich aus der Menschheitsgeschichte gebildet hatte, die Geschichte der unvergleichlich anderen Bewegungen und Gebilde des Erdballs gedacht werden sollte, bewirkte noch immer einen ruckhaften, körperlichen Taumel, und es war ihm oft geradezu unmöglich, mit den zu untersuchenden Orten die Zeit mitzudenken.[223] (19)

The vast differences between the geologic histories of each land formation disconnect him from the present and produce in him a corporeal dizziness. Sorger wonders how language—a human construction—could be used to think through the history and development of the earth and he struggles "die Zeit mitzudenken"[224] in the places he studies (19). What also stands out here is that Sorger is struck far more by the invisible vast time scale than by the visible physical structures he observes.[225]

This conflict of geologic time and languages leads Sorger to imagine a paradigm shift in the representation of vast temporalities: "Er ahnte die Möglichkeit eines ganz verschiedenen Darstellungsschemas der Zeitverläufe in den Landschaftsformen…"[226] (19). At the moment when Handke wrestles with his own language, he points precisely to

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[223] "…the rites in which it apprehended the landscape, its conventions of description and nomenclature, its conception of time and space, struck him as dubious. Having to use a language that had grown out of the history of mankind to describe the different movements and formations of the earth still made his head swim, and often he found it quite impossible to take account of time along with the places he had set out to investigate" (9-10).

[224] Literally, "to think with the time."

[225] There are parallels here to Timothy Morton's remarks in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology at the End of the World*. He refers to the time of hyperobjects, "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (1), as petrifying and notes that it is easier to conceive of the concept of infinity than to imagine, for example, hundreds of thousands of anything, let alone years (60).

[226] "He suspected the possibility of an entirely different schema for representing the correlation between time and geological formations…" (10).

the dialogue between geology and literature by asking how it can be possible to narrate a phenomenon that pre-dates narration. Like the textbook geologist, Sorger turns instead to drawing in his field notebook to access the landscapes, a process that ultimately brings him closer to the forms. As we have seen, the landscapes and their formations become part of his "höchstpersönlichen Raum"[227] throughout the months of observation (11). The intimacy of Sorger's relationship to the landscape is strikingly characteristic of the Anthropocene in that his personal history becomes fused with the terrain's, "in ein zeitliches Gewölbe"[228] (53). This synthesis is perhaps most apparent in the novel's distinct passage in which Handke combines the human and nonhuman world; "Mitdenkend mit der Erde die Erde denkend als denkende Welt ohne Ende"[229] (64).

Braungart locates Sorger's skepticism with language as a key feature of the text, calling it a "fundamentale Erschütterung eines naiven Anthropozentrismus"[230] (25). Anticipating scholarship in material ecocriticism, Braungart points to the tension of representing the material world on the scale of deep time in the text. He writes, "Ästhetisch gesehen provoziert die geologische Dimension der Wirklichkeit die Frage nach der Darstellbarkeit. Wie kann man diesen Dimensionen sprachlich-erzählerisch beikommen?"[231] (29). Handke explores the possibilities and limits of narrating events in the geologic past through Sorger's field work. As Sorger struggles with the boundaries of language that limit its ability to grasp and describe material forces, he turns to another

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[227] "own private domain" (5).
[228] "into a temporal vault" (33).
[229] "Thinking the earth with the earth as a thinking world without end" (40).
[230] "fundamental shock of a naïve anthropocentrism."
[231] "Aesthetically, the geologic dimension of reality provokes the question of representation. How can one cope with these dimensions in a linguistic-narrative way?"

form of representation: sketching. Sketching and photography are described in the geomorphology textbooks Handke read before his trip to Alaska and are recommended as important modes of representation for the geologist. Handke is clearly interested in the practice of the geologist in the field, and especially in the importance of precise observation, documentation and representations—all of which deeply relate to literature.

One textbook explains how a geologist should be equipped for field work, down to a particular type of jacket with a very specific number and placement of pockets (Leser 22). This inventory, and a number of other details, make their way into Handke's representations of geology and the geologist in *Langsame Heimkehr*. The narrator provides a description of Sorger's colleague Lauffer in the typical fieldwork attire: "so sah er seinen Kollegen Lauffer in diesem Moment – in schlammverkrusteten Schaftstiefeln und der Spezialjacke mit den vielen Taschen, eine blinkende Lupe um den Hals, von der Geländearbeit gerade zurückgekehrt"[232] (*Langsame* 20). According to *Das Geographische Seminar* textbook, sketching is the geologist's most important observational method while in the field. Leser writes that sketching, in contrast to photography, "zwingt zum genauen Beobachten, zum Erfassen der Formen in allen Einzelheiten und zum Herausarbeiten der charakteristischen Züge"[233] (Leser 71). Though Leser acknowledges that sketching is more subjective than photography, he attributes to it the ability to communicate more about the object being studied. The parallels between

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[232] "in mud-caked high boots and characteristic multi-pocketed jacket, a sparkling magnifying glass hanging from his neck (he had just come in from his fieldwork)" (10-11).

[233] "forces exact observations, to comprehend the forms in all details and to work out their characteristic features."

Leser's remarks on sketching and Sorger's are striking; both deal with questions of representation and reveal a deep concern with form. In Leser's textbook, Handke highlights a passage that describes the precision demanded by the act of sketching: "Hier ist eine scharfe Grenze zu ziehen: Die Zeichnung kann nur als wissenschaftliches Dokument angesprochen werden, wenn eine möglichst wirklichkeitsnahe und objektive Wiedergabe angestrebt worden ist"[234] (Leser 71). The standard presented here of "möglichst wirklichkeitsnahe" (as realistic as possible) is one of mimesis, which places considerable demands on the geologist. Moreover, such ambition of near perfect representation has the potential to render the object of study as static. However, the intense focus on natural forms that occurs in the process of sketching has the potential to create a deeply meaningful and reciprocal relationship between subject and object, which we see in *Langsame Heimkehr*.[235]

Sorger turns to drawing to become more familiar with the landscapes, a process that ultimately brings him closer to the forms he studies. Like the exemplary textbook geologist, Sorger prefers sketching to photography, as the narrator explains: "Er zog das Zeichnen, auch in der Arbeit, dem Fotografieren vor, weil ihm dabei erst die Landschaft in all ihren Formen begreiflich wurde; und er war jedesmal überrascht, wie viele Formen

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[234] "Here a distinct line must be drawn: the sketch can only be considered a scientific document if a reproduction is sought that is as realistic as possible and objective."
[235] Further exploration on the subject-object relationship of the geologist to natural forms in the process of sketching could provide insights in connection with material ecocriticism. In particular, Theodor W. Adorno remarks in his essay "On Subject and Object" that both subject and object "have reciprocal need of each other: one can hardly be comprehended without the other" (245) and shows how each constitutes the other.

sich da zeigten, sogar in einer auf den ersten Blick ganz eintönigen Ödnis"[236] (47). This passage and other accounts of Sorger's sketching activity frame the natural formations as dynamic and demanding of his attention. While photography represents a momentary instance of encounter, sketching requires more time and focus on behalf of the observer. For Sorger, the natural forms only become *begreiflich* (comprehensible) in sketching. His surprise comes from the forms *revealing themselves* ("wie viele Formen sich da zeigten") from what is framed as an otherwise desolate (and therefore void of interest) landscape. In Handke's formulation, the actor is not the human, but rather the natural forms and they become present to the observer.

Sketching is presented in the novel as a kinesthetic action that requires focus and time, and through which the natural formations become visible and distinct to the sketcher. Especially given its framing as an alternative to photography, sketching as a process suggests that the object of the sketch is also a process (a dynamic entity). The effort Sorger puts into sketching and the reciprocal relationship that results become clear through Handke's descriptions. The narrator describes a specific place that Sorger sketched daily, thereby producing phenological observations of geologic change. The area is near an earthquake fault line that is, at first, unremarkable and inconspicuous, but it "bildete sich erst heraus mit der andauernden Mühe des Zeichnens, und wurde dadurch beschreibbar"[237] (54). The area only becomes describable (*beschreibbar*) through his

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[236] "Even in his work, he preferred drawing to photography because it was only through drawing that he came to understand the landscape in all its forms: he was invariably surprised to see how many forms revealed themselves in what seemed at first sight to be a dull and monotonous vista" (29).
[237] "it took shape through the prolonged effort of sketching, which alone made it describable" (33).

constant effort of sketching. The passage continues: "Dieses Mittelstück, das keine einzige besondere Oberflächenform auswies, nicht einmal eine kleine Sumpfmulde, und das er nur in einer Art Füllzwang mitskizzierte, wurde mit der Zeit absichtslos ein ganz eigener Landschaftsteil"[238] (54). Sorger is described as completely captivated by sketching and the subject of this sentence is the middle area. Through Sorger's sketching, it transforms from an unremarkable form to a part of the landscape in its own right; it becomes another form.

This particular area that captivates Sorger is connected to earthquakes—a reoccurring motif in *Langsame Heimkehr*, both as a symbol for rupture and change and as the product of material forces. Ines Barner rightly refers to earthquakes in the novel as a locus "zwischen Natur und Kultur"[239] (365). Sorger recalls experiencing his first earthquake a few years earlier after his arrival on the West Coast. His recollection of the event illustrates the nonhuman forces at play; "es war, als bewegten sich große Berge,"[240] and the catastrophic event brings up feelings of mortality for Sorger (139). Besides his recollection of his first experience of an earthquake, the other numerous mentions of earthquakes are focused on the material damage and traces they leave behind or representations of their force.

On the day of Sorger's return to the city on the West Coast, for example, he heads to one of his favorite spots—the "Erdbebenpark" (Earthquake Park)—to sketch. In the

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[238] "Through no intention of his, this center, which disclosed no particular surface form, not so much as a small swampy depression, and which only a sense of having to fill up his page led him to sketch, gradually took on a decided individuality" (33)
[239] "between nature and culture."
[240] "great mountains seemed to be moving" (90).

park he sketches an area that had been overturned by an earthquake: "eine Erdstelle, die durch das Beben aus dem tieferen Untergrund an die Oberfläche gekehrt worden war"[241] (116). As this example demonstrates, earthquakes can make physical remnants of the deep past visible. Thus, sketching in the Earthquake Park in particular illuminates the material agency of nonhuman forces, both as an example of tangible change and as it seems to challenge Sorger in his sketching. The forms in this particular landscape appear to him only as he attempts to capture them in his drawing; "Selber ausdruckslos, wartete er in der Landschaft auf 'die Gestalt'"[242] (116). The word *Gestalt* echoes the earlier explanation of Sorger coming to a feeling of himself (als Eigengestalt) through comprehending natural formations (Erdgestalt) (16). Additionally, Sorger waits for "die Gestalt" of the land, indicating the land as an active player in the exchange. His focus on earthquakes literally uncovers the material of the past as the fault lines open up to reveal the earth's layers: "Der Ausschnitt war klein, und doch gingen darin die Erdschichten deutlich in alle Richtungen auseinander—im Abzeichnen war noch an dem winzigsten Richtungswechsel die Gewalt der große Katastrophe erlebbar"[243] (116). The violence Sorger describes here is distinctly nonhuman: there are roots of overturned trees that stick up out of the new grass, creating a tableau of "storied matter."

Stacy Alaimo, in her article exploring the concept of trans-corporeality in aquatic environments, argues that trans-corporeality offers "...a sense that the human is held, but

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[241] "a tract of land which the tremor had turned upside down, raising and underground stratum to the surface" (74).
[242] "Himself expressionless, he waited in the landscape for a 'figure' to emerge" (74).
[243] "It was a small tract, yet in it different strata could clearly be seen to disperse in all directions—and in every minute change of direction Sorger, as he sketched, could sense the overpowering force of the tremor" (74).

not held up, by invisible genealogies and a maelstrom of often imperceptible substances that disclose connections between humans and the sea" ("States" 478). Replacing "sea" with "forms" would allow us to exemplify Sorger's relation to his objects of study. Handke, in the passages that depict sketching, and in many other instances throughout *Langsame Heimkehr*, describes Sorger repeatedly as absorbed in a similar manner with the landforms demanding his attention. In the West Coast city, for example, Sorger continues his observations and sketching and Handke inverts the expected relationship between subject and object; "Im Zeichnen wurde ihm warm, und das Wasser der Bucht im Hintergrund rückte näher. Nichts lenkte ihn ab, er hatte Zeit. Das Gezeichnete begann seinen Blick zu erwidern"[244] (116). Sorger is suspended in a way similar to what Alaimo describes in so far as he cannot be distracted from his task; rather, the process animates him. The preceding sentence illustrates the profound reciprocal relationship between subject and object, as the object, "the sketched," returns the gaze of the sketcher.

The act of sketching situates Sorger in such a way that he is completely attuned to his surroundings: "Außerdem kam ihm jede Gegend erst näher, indem er sie—möglichst getreu und ohne die in seiner Wissenschaft üblich geworden Schematisierungen und Weglassungen—Linie für Linie nachzeichnete, und er konnte dann, wenn auch nur vor sich selber, mit gutem Gewissen behaupten, dagewesen zu sein"[245] (47). In the first

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[244] "Sketching made him feel warm, and the water of the bay in the background came closer. Nothing distracted his attention, and he had plenty of time. His 'subject' began to answer his gaze" (74).

[245] "A place took on meaning for him only when he drew it line for line—as faithfully as possible, without the schematizations and omissions that had become customary in his science—and it was only then that he could claim with a clear conscience, if only to himself, to have been there" (29).

clause of this sentence, the subject is "jede Gegend" (each/every area), signaling that it is each area that comes closer to him, not Sorger who nears the forms. He also acknowledges the limits of his sketching in that it is only a representation with the qualifier, "möglichst getreu" (as accurate as possible), echoing Leser's instructions for a geologist's sketch to be "möglichst wirklichkeitsnahe" (as realistic as possible). Yet, this is only the case in the intra-active process of sketching as Sorger attempts to represent the area as accurately as possible.

This passage furthermore calls attention to the incredulity that I argue forms the basis for some of Sorger's (and Handke's) crisis. It is only though his careful sketching that he can claim to have been in a place. His desire for a "true" representation is connected to his need for evidence to prove he has been somewhere. The qualifying remark "wenn auch nur vor sich selber"[246] discloses a need to render his own experiences believable, because they would otherwise be unbelievable. Although "true" representation is held up in textbooks as the standard in geology, Handke wrestles with what verisimilitude means in literary representation. In his notebook from February to April 1979, Handke grapples with his expression of "truth" in what would become *Langsame Heimkehr*. This notebook is filled with notes of what he intends to add to the draft and different attempts at formulating key passages in the novel. One theme that emerges in this notebook is that Handke grapples with the use of the word *tatsächlich*, meaning actually or true to reality. The German adjective *tatsächlich* comes from the noun *Tatsache*, which means a fact or an actuality and is built from the words *Tat*, (deed)

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[246] "if only to himself" (29).

and Sache (thing).[247] The compound word was first used in 1756 and modeled after the English "matter of fact" to more closely resemble the Latin *res facti* ("Tatsache"). The first mention of the word in Handke's journal is when he writes ",actually' = wirklich (in English)"[248] and then on the next line "statt ,tatsächlich' ,actually'?"[249] (Notebook 19, page 63, DLA Marbach). Later, he writes "wie das Wort tatsächlich da vermeiden? [250]" and "statt ,tatsächlich' ,wieder'"[251] (Notebook 19, page 95, DLA Marbach). Other potential replacements he suggests for the word *tatsächlich* include "auch"[252] (Notebook 19, page 99, DLA Marbach) and "bel et bien" [253] (Notebook 19, page 116, DLA Marbach). Handke's desire to avoid the word *tatsächlich* is linked to questions of representation raised in the novel: how can an author or artist represent something in a way that is true to the object being represented?

In Handke's next notebook (from April to July 1979), he returns to the issue of "true" representations. This time, he writes "„wirklich" = „glaubhaft""[254] and raises the questions of belief and incredulity that captivate him (Notebook 20, no page (file number 48), DLA Marbach). This paradox, then, is reflected in *Langsame Heimkehr* through Sorger's questioning of scientific language. Sorger never claims mastery over the forms.

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[247] In the context of Sorger's historical guilt in the novel, it should also be mentioned that the word *Täter* (perpetrator, lit. doer) shares roots with the word *Tatsache*. Sorger considers himself "ein Nachkomme von Tätern, und sah sich selber als Täter; und die Völkermörder seines Jahrhunderts als Ahnherren" (*Langsame* 103).
[248] "'actually' = actually (in English)"
[249] "instead of 'really' 'actually'?"
[250] "How to avoid the word 'really'?"
[251] "instead of 'really' 'again'"
[252] "also"
[253] French "truly", literally "beautiful and good."
[254] "'actually' = 'believable'"

Handke frames Sorger's geologic research as the "…(annähernden) Erfahrung ihrer Formen und deren Entstehung…"[255] (11), he does not claim this knowledge to be precise or that he geologist is able to know everything, which also demonstrates Handke's understanding of the complexity of natural systems.

Incredulity about representational modes permeates the novel and is connected to Sorger's struggle with the natural formations and language. When Lauffer describes to Sorger his plans for his next paper, for instance, he says it won't be an analysis, but "eher eine Bildbeschreibung"[256] (63). Braungart points to the discord between language and form in his analysis of Handke and geology: "Sorger ist nicht der Meister des Wortes, sondern der Forscher der 'Formen,' wie es heißt, nicht die Sprache ist sein Medium, sondern das Bild"[257] (24). This sets up an important contrast between Sorger and Handke; while Sorger is focused on the spatial dimension of forms, Handke remains invested in written form even as Sorger expresses skepticism in language or, as in the following example, when imagining the timescale of the formation of various natural forms. While discussing their work, Sorger explains to Lauffer how this impacts him in one of the few instances of direct dialogue in the novel:

> Mir geht es so, daß ich manchmal bei dem Versuch, mir Alter und Entstehung verschiedenartiger Formen in ein und derselben Landschaft und ihr Verhältnis zueinander vorzustellen, gerade durch die schwindelerregende Vielfältigkeit in solch einem einzigen weitgespannten Vorstellungsbild, wenn mir dieses dann

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[255] "learning (approximately) its forms and their genesis" (5).
[256] "More like a description of pictures" (39).
[257] "Sorger is not the master of words, but rather the researcher of 'forms,' as it is called, language is not his medium, but rather image."

endlich gelungen ist, zu phantasieren anfange. In diesen Augenblicken, ohne ein Philosoph zu sein, weiß ich doch, daß ich ganz natürlich philosophiere.[258] (63)

Trying to imagine the genesis of the different land forms produces a dizziness in him. Especially troubling to Sorger are the age of the forms and the interconnectedness of forms in a particular landscape. Though he doesn't specifically include himself in this conception, his philosophizing suggests that he simultaneously questions his place in this history, especially considering the previous reference to Sorger's closeness to the landscape and his desire to understand himself as a feeling of form.

Sorger must consequently rely on language to communicate his findings and create a history of the formations he studies, but at the same time he questions the very language he must use. Furthermore, in reading the story of pre-human geology in the landscape, Sorger wrestles with how he fits into this history—and he fails to find a language of his self vis-à-vis geologic history, leading to his estrangement. This is where the crises of the forms of history, language and landscape come together to create Sorger's estrangement. The description of Sorger's notebooks illuminates the close connection between writing, sketching and geology. When Sorger spreads out his notebooks from his years of fieldwork on the table, they transform into the earth's layers: "Sorger bereitete die Hefte mit den Aufzeichnungen über den Tisch, so daß jedes einzelne mit seiner besonderen Farbe erschien und die ganze Tischfläche gleichsam zu

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[258] "Sometimes when I try to form an idea of the age and genesis of different forms in the same landscape and their relation to one another, the incredible diversity of this one broad canvas starts me daydreaming. I am not a philosopher, but as such times I know that it's natural for me to philosophize" (39).

einer geologischen Karte wurde, wo bunte Flächen die verschiedenen Erdzeitalter bedeuteten"[259] (200). Handke represents history as both material and spatial.

Looking at his notebooks filled with his sketches and observations in his hotel room in New York, Sorger seems to achieve a new understanding of his work as a geologist: "Er blätterte die Heft durch und sah sich in der Schrift verschwinden: in der Geschichte der Geschichten, einer Geschichte von Sonne und Schnee"[260] (200-201). We can interpret this sentence in a number of ways. One interpretation would be as Sorger's further and ultimate alienation as he loses himself to the form of geology; he disappears in the face of a nonhuman history that is much larger and much longer than his own personal history or the history of humans in general. Another interpretation would focus on the way geology is framed. As the history of histories ("[die] Geschichte der Geschichten"), it implies a grand narrative of multiple histories. The German word *Geschichte* can mean both story and history and this dual meaning is useful for interpreting geologic changes as "storied matter" in the sense of material ecocriticism. Moreover, it also helps to form a sense of the layered structure of the deep past in that it is *geschichtet*—made up of multiple layers (*Schichten*). This material-spatial conceptualization of history fits with Sorger's concern about form. The use of the dative case ("in der Geschichte…" and "in einer Geschichte") signals Sorger's (and also the reader's and humans') position in relation to this history; we are all already in it.

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[259] "Sorger spread out his notebooks, each with its special color, on the table. The tabletop became a sort of geological map, with different colors indicating the different geological eras" (130).
[260] "He leafed through the notebooks and saw himself disappearing in the writing; in the story of stories: a story of sun and snow" (130).

In this passage describing the spread-out notebooks, Sorger loses himself "in der Schrift."[261] *Schrift* can mean both handwriting and writing in general, as an entire communicative system. The use of the preposition *in* with dative case indicates that the disappearance occurs in the writing rather than into it. I stress the use of *Schrift* because, as previously mentioned, Sorger records his observations from the field in sketches, not in writing and much of novel is dedicated to describing Sorger's practice of sketching. Just a few lines earlier, the narrator recalls how Sorger spreads out "die Hefte mit den Aufzeichnungen."[262] The change from sketching to writing fits with the project of novel as a whole; despite the many descriptions of landscape and of Sorger sketching the landscape, Handke never abandons his use of writing.[263]

What, then, is the history of sun and snow that captivates Handke? It is significant that the concept of history given here is a nonhuman one; sun and snow are both nonhuman forces that affect humans and with which humans interact in the ways that theories of material ecocriticism explore.[264] For humans, the sun is the main indicator of the passing of time. The constellation of sun and snow also repeatedly appears in Handke's journals, where this idea of (geologic) history takes shape. Interestingly, though, there is very little mention of snow in *Langsame Heimkehr*.[265] Snow first comes

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[261] "in the writing" (130).
[262] "the notebooks with the sketches."
[263] Cf. Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*. Also, this is especially true in *Die Lehre der Saint Victoire* in which Handke thoroughly explores a visual medium through writing. Further comparisons are possible with Timothy Morton's "Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology."
[264] See the effects of snow: "Er kam ins Hotel zurück mit vom Schnee tauber Haut" (163) ("He went back to the hotel, his skin numb from the snow" (105)).
[265] It is also interesting to recall that the original publication of the novel had a completely white cover that could mimic a whiteout snowstorm.

into play as Sorger attempts to leave Alaska in the postal airplane, but they are forced to turn back because of "der erste Schneesturm des Winters"[266] (87). The history of sun and snow is the history of the geologic change that captivates Sorger. Thinking back to the descriptions in the geology textbooks that explain the formation of certain landscapes as taking place through a series of changes in climate, nonhuman forces play a powerful role in shaping the world.

Grounding

Finding a place for himself in the vast history of the geologic past ultimately provides a remedy for Sorger's estrangement. This occurs when he writes down a *Gesetz* for himself while in a coffee shop in New York that connects the forms of language and history, allowing him to find un understanding of himself as part of history as a form. With his *Gesetz*, he states the following: "Ich erkläre mich verantwortlich für meine Zukunft, sehne mich nach der ewigen Vernunft und will nie mehr allein sein. So sei es"[267] (178). The *Gesetz* is inextricably connected to language and the crisis of language Handke works through in the novel. Before Sorger feverishly writes down his *Gesetz*, he experiences a moment without language; "…und Sorger, erst in qualvoller Konvulsion (es gab für diesen Moment ja keine Sprache), dann in Ruhe und Sachlichkeit, schrieb auf, um das Gesehene, bevor es sich wieder verflüchtigte, rechtskräftig zu machen"[268] (176-177). It is further significant that when Sorger makes his *Gesetz* he writes it into

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[266] "the first snowstorm of the winter" (56).
[267] "I declare myself responsible for my future, I long for eternal reason and will never again be alone. So be it" (115).
[268] "at first painfully convulsed (for this moment there was no language), then calm and matter-of-fact, Sorger wrote, to give the force of law to what he had seen, before it vanished" (114).

existence. It is a performative act in the text: "Ich glaube diesem Augenblick: indem ich ihn aufschreibe, *soll er mein Gesetz sein*"[269] (178, original emphasis). Not only does his *Gesetz* help to guide him, it also serves to mitigate his disbelief; he believes the moment.[270] The repetition of the first-person pronoun "ich" in this passage hints that Sorger is moving close to healing his estrangement, but the entire passage appears in quotations as the "ich" is what Sorger writes in his *Gesetz*. Like the early geologists that wrote their discipline into existence, Sorger (and Handke) write themselves into existence. The first-person "ich" in the passage anticipates the narrator's switch to addressing Sorger in the second person that soon follows.

The *Gesetz* frees him from his guilt, but not from history: "…mich lossprechend von meiner Schuld… Es ist zugleich mein geschichtlicher Augenblick"[271] (177). Instead, the *Gesetz* brings him closer together to natural history: "Sorger starrte sich aus dem Spiegel des Coffee Shop leer-erschöpft, menschlich-versteinert, wie aus der Tiefe von Jahrhunderten entgegen; er war an diesem Tag gerührt von seinem eigenen Gesicht."[272] In this moment Sorger recognizes himself as part of natural history, as signaled by including the time frame of centuries, and therefore also revises his former perceptions in Alaska of natural areas being devoid of humans. The emptiness that he previously

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[269] "I believe in this moment; in writing it down; *I make it my law*" (115, original emphasis).
[270] The use of *Augenblick* signifies not only the temporal moment, but also the act of seeing. Sorger can finally believe what he sees.
[271] "absolving me of my transgression… At the same time, it is my historic moment" (114).
[272] "Sorger stared at himself in the coffee-shop mirror, empty, exhausted, petrified, as though emerging from the depth of centuries; on that day he was moved by his own face" (115).

perceived in the landscape is now seen in his reflection. The face he confronts is "menschlich-versteinert," which can be understood both as fossilized *as a human* or *humanely*. The first sense of the word connects humans to part of the much larger scale of geologic time and evokes the possibility—or rather, probability—that one day humans will partly leave their trace as fossils. The second understanding of *menschlich* as humanely connects back to Sorger's sense of historical guilt and his resolution that the future can be peaceful. In both cases, the reflection of Sorger's fossilized face "wie aus der Tiefe von Jahrhunderten"[273] presents a connection with the geologic past. Previously, in Alaska, it was the vast landscapes that evoked an emotional response in him, but now, in the coffee shop, his own face is what moves him.

The events that precede Sorger establishing and writing his *Gesetz* are singularly unremarkable and there is not a certain event that triggers his change or to signal that the potential for healing was always there. Moreover, the coffee shop where he has his revelation is an ordinary place, especially when compared to the landscapes in Alaska previously detailed in the novel. In Handke's notebooks, the coffee shop emerges as a key location for Sorger and is shortened to "C.S." By staging Sorger's revelation in a common setting, Handke makes the *Gesetz* accessible to everyone, indicating that every person is responsible for the future. This is also emphasized in the *Gesetz* as he writes that history is "eine von jedermann (auch von mir) fortsetzbare, friedensstiftende *Form*"[274] (177, original emphasis).

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[273] "as though emerging from the depth of centuries" (115).
[274] "a peace-fostering *form* that can be perpetuated by anyone (including me)" (114, original emphasis).

In *Langsame Heimkehr*, Peter Handke explores the forms of history, both human and natural, and language, weaving these different strands together to reveal the profound connections between how humans perceive the material changes in the geologic past and interact with the nonhuman world around them. Though Handke's novel predates contemporary environmental debates surrounding the Anthropocene by around thirty years, it nonetheless raises questions pertinent to today's issues. In terms of material ecocriticism, the novel demonstrates the complex questions of representing nonhuman changes. Handke's deep interest in geology shows in the textbooks he studied before he traveled to Alaska and it is clear that this knowledge informed the way he wrote about the nonhuman environment in the novel.

The "grounding" that Handke and Sorger search for is both literal, in that they both search for a feeling of being physically connected with the material world, and figurative, in terms of finding the language with which to ground oneself (or express oneself). It is notable, then, that the prose text ends with lines of verse that reinforce the connection to the earth: "Entschwebendes Gesicht! / Die Steine zu meinen Füßen bringen dich näher / Mich in sie vertiefend, / beschwere ich uns mit ihnen"[275] (210). The last line indicates a deep connection by being weighed down with the stones and the verb *beschweren* can also indicate being bothered or burdened by something—a condition that is reflected in Sorger's (literally, one who worries) name and his emotional trajectory in the novel. If we contrast these last lines of verse to an earlier passage that details a dream before Sorger's first attempt to leave Alaska, we see that the stones play and important

[275] "Vanishing face! / The stones at my feet bring you closer; / Immersing myself in them, / I weigh us down with them." (137).

role in his grounding: "Im Traum wurde Sorgers Gehirn zu einer Weltkarte, und er erwachte als Erdhaufen mit vielen Steinen darin"[276] (86).

In a thoroughly researched article on Handke's revision process for *Langsame Heimkehr,* Ines Barner shows how the input of Handke's editor Elisabeth Borchers shaped the novel, and especially its last lines of verse. Borchers ultimately suggested to Handke that he remove the words "bunte Grimasse"[277] from the first line and cut what would have been the last line, "Nie wieder will ich Masken sehen"[278] (Barner 364). With this decision, the focus changes from the motif of faces and masks to one of grounding—from the face to the feet. The line that appears immediately before this short poem describes Sorger's plane breaking through the clouds on its way to Europe. The stones at the feet, then, bring the focus back to the ground and the earth's surface. After Sorger makes his *Gesetz* in New York, he has a moment of becoming "ungrounded" on his way to the cash register: "…Sorger hatte beim Hingehen einen Schrekensmoment lang keinen Grund mehr unter den Füßen. Es war, als seien die Bodenplatten des Lokals einfach auf die Erde, wie sie war, ohne Einebnung, aufgelegt worden"[279] (180). The transition from a moment of terror in which the ground disappears from beneath him to a harmonious connection to the earth signals Sorger's grounding.

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[276] "In a dream, Sorger's brain became a map of the world, and when he woke up, he was a mound of earth with a lot of stones in it" (55).
[277] "colorful grimace."
[278] "I never want to see masks again."
[279] "for a terrifying moment Sorger felt that the ground was gone from under his feet, as though the floorboards has been laid on the bare, unleveled earth" (116).

Chapter 4:
Stratigraphy and Sight: Grounded perspective in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung*

In one especially gripping chapter of Jenny Erpenbeck's 2008 novel *Heimsuchung*, a twelve-year-old girl named Doris hides from Nazi soldiers in a small, dark closet in Poland. Deprived of light in her hiding space, Doris's memories take her to the lake where she had spent summer days at her uncle's cabin. The reader is transported from the cramped closet to a colorful landscape filled with trees:

> …während die Dunkelheit so groß ist, daß das Mädchen nicht einmal erkennen kann, wo sie aufhört, erscheinen in seinem Kopf Erinnerungen an Tage, an denen das ganze Blickfeld mit Farben ausgefüllt war bis an die Ränder. Wolken, Himmel und Blätter, Blätter von Eichen, Blätter der Weide, die wie Haare herunterhängen, schwarze Erde zwischen den Zehen, trockene Kiefernnadeln und Gras, Kienzapfen, schuppige Rinde, Wolken, Himmel und gleißendes Wasser, in dem die Sonne sich spiegelt.[280] (81)

This bright scene at the lake is striking both because of the stark contrast it offers with the dark space and also because the vivid and specific descriptions are entirely from Doris's memory. Doris hides in darkness, yet the reader sees the picturesque landscape through

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[280] "…as the darkness is so great that the girl can't even recognize where her body stops, her head is visited by memories of days on which her entire field of vision was overflowing with colors. Clouds, sky and leaves, the leaves of oak trees, leaves of the willow hanging down like hair, black dirt between her toes, dry pine needles and grass, pine cones, scaly bark, clouds, sky and gleaming water in which the sun is reflected…" (59-60, this and following English translations are from Susan Bernofsky's 2010 translation *Visitation*).

her eyes. The contrast between her dark hiding spot and the colorful memories raises crucial questions about the narrative perspective that I explore in this chapter.

The lake outside of Berlin to which Doris's memories transport the reader is the main focus of Erpenbeck's novel. Like a human protagonist, the lake is constantly in flux and Erpenbeck captures its transformations in poetic detail. Beginning in the prologue, the reader learns of the geologic processes that began more than twenty thousand years ago, when a glacier settles next to a bluff, crushing trees and rocks along the way, and remains there for millennia. A few thousands of years later, one piece of ice breaks off from the massive glacier and slowly melts, eventually forming the small lake. In vivid detail, Erpenbeck brings to life these processes that occurred in the deep past and at a rate normally imperceptible to humans.

Set against this backdrop of the geologic past, the chapters that follow describe the area and its human residents, alternating between the mysterious figure of the gardener and twelve other inhabitants. Named after particular occupants—for example, "Der Großbauer und seine vier Töchter,"[281] "Der Architekt"[282] and "Der Tuchfabrikant"[283]—the chapters span over 100 years, creating a panorama of the history of the twentieth century fraught with violence. In contrast to the abrupt changes in residency and ownership of many of the inhabitants, the gardener remains on the property. Though the chapters are generally placed in chronological order, they do not confirm to a precise historical sequence. Instead, each focuses on a human life and

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[281] "The Wealthy Farmer and His Four Daughters" (4).
[282] "The Architect" (21).
[283] "The Cloth Manufacturer" (33).

reveals how each person is connected to the land and to one another. Therefore, Erpenbeck broadens the focus from relationships strictly between humans to the connections that are created with the nonhuman, material world. Each of these human residents leaves a trace on the land, the sedimentary nature of which is mirrored by the book's layered structure, suggestive of the earth's stratigraphic layers.

Throughout the novel, presumed rights of inheritance are continuously disrupted, for varying reasons embedded in historical, social, and political contexts and the alternating chapter structures stress the themes of changing ownership, which I will detail briefly here. The earliest known human inhabitants of the property in the novel, "der Großbauer und seine vier Töchter," had enjoyed a long tradition of family inheritance of the lakeshore area as well as the surrounding forests until the inheritance ends when the mayor's four daughters are denied their bequest because of arbitrary and outmoded laws that favor only men. After it becomes clear to the mayor that the property will not remain in his family, he divides the land into parcels to be sold. The first two thirds are sold to two Jewish families and the last third to an architect. The architect, who builds the main structure on the property, is revealed to be a member of Albert Speer's *Germania Projekt,* whose goal was to realize Hitler's vision of Berlin (180). Yet, as the reader finds out, the architect lied about this Jewish heritage (his paternal great-grandmother was Jewish) on his application to the *Reichskulturkammer*. When he later buys the property of his Jewish neighbors, he does so with the intention of helping them finance their departure from Germany, "Nach Afrika wohl. Oder Schanghai"[284] (44). Although the architect

[284] "No doubt they went to Africa. Or Shanghai" (29).

eventually designs and builds the lake house, he cannot be the legal owner of the land. Instead, his soon-to-be second wife signs the deed of sale to prevent the property from going to the architect's current wife as a result of the divorce. Years later the architect is arrested, and he and his second wife are both forced to leave the GDR. The revelation that the architect's second wife legally still owns the house on land in a country she cannot enter without fear of being arrested leads her to accordingly vow to leave the property to a female relative, "jedenfalls keinem Mann"[285] (76).

Doris's uncle Ludwig, "der Tuchfabrikant," successfully escapes Germany for South Africa, unlike Doris and her parents. While on a visit in South Africa, in the midst of their emigration attempt, Ludwig's father laments the loss of the lakeside property, commenting "aber schad um dein Erbe"[286] (59). Ludwig's parents sell his property to their neighbor, the architect, to pay for their trip out of Germany. Failing unfortunately to obtain their passports and arrange travel on time, they never manage to leave. Furthermore, Ludwig does not receive ownership of the property after his father's death in a concentration camp; it goes instead to Nazi Germany (61). One chapter is devoted to a Red Army officer and his troops who stay at the house for one night and a following one depicts "die Schriftstellerin"[287] who returns to Germany after fleeing to the Soviet Union following World War II. The final chapter focuses on "die unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin,"[288] who is the granddaughter of the "Schriftstellerin." Although she must soon hand over the keys after a court hearing deems her acquisition of the property and

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[285] "But not to any man" (56).
[286] "but what a shame about your inheritance" (42).
[287] "The Writer" (86).
[288] "The Illegitimate Owner" (136).

house illegal, the woman spends days carefully cleaning the house. Finally, in the epilogue, the house is demolished and "die Landschaft [gleicht] für einen kurzen Moment wieder sich selbst"[289] (188). The alternating chapter structure means that these multiple human stories can be told alongside each other. Erpenbeck provides key examples of women whose right to inheritance is repeatedly denied and depicts Jewish families who are driven from their homes because of issues with inheritance and anti-Semitism. Yet, these human stories are embedded the larger context of geologic history, which is the focus of the prologue and is the woven throughout the following chapters.

To explore the complex structure of the novel, this chapter seeks to illuminate how Erpenbeck weaves together human and nonhuman stories of the twentieth century and the deep past. My analysis begins by situating Erpenbeck's narrative of twentieth century history within the larger context of intellectual history, exposing the shared roots of Enlightenment thinking and contemporary environmental problems. Then I examine Erpenbeck's use of focalization, spatialization, and the novel's structure to develop the nonhuman perspective of the story. Close reading of these aspects draws on theories of material ecocriticism as a lens through which to analyze the nonhuman elements of the novel and consider the temporal dimensions of narratives of deep history. Finally, I analyze the figure of the gardener to show how he functions to link the human and nonhuman stories by providing what I call a grounded perspective. The way in which *Heimsuchung* represents nonhuman elements and agency depends on the fact that the environment is a key factor in how stories are created and told. From an ecocritical

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[289] "the landscape, if ever so briefly, resembles itself once more" (150).

perspective, Erpenbeck's novel articulates the interdependent relationships shared by humans and nonhumans. By focusing on the agency of nonhumans and the changes of the deep geologic past, Erpenbeck successfully decenters the category of the human to make room for nonhuman stories, while still preserving important stories of violence and injustice in which individual humans are harmed.

In an interview with the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*, Erpenbeck notes that one of the major themes in all her work is "die Frage, wie man mit verschwundener Vergangenheit umgeht,"[290] referring to her connection to the GDR and the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that often accompanies German authors ("Erinnerung"). Born in East Berlin in 1967, Erpenbeck is the author of short stories, plays and novels. Her grandparents Hedda Zinner and Fritz Erpenbeck were well-known authors and members of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) who lived in exile in the Soviet Union during World War II.[291] Erpenbeck's background in theater is evident in *Heimsuchung*'s structure, in which each chapter is comparable to a new scene. Before beginning her degree in theater at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Erpenbeck completed an apprenticeship in bookbinding and worked in a number of theaters. In 1990, she transferred to the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler to study music theater directing and later staged theater productions in Berlin and Graz, Austria. Katja Schubert comments on the similarities between the theater and *Heimsuchung*, noting that the gardener acts as scene changer between the different acts and mentioning that Erpenbeck

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[290] "the question of how one deals with a vanished past."
[291] The figure of "Die Schriftstellerin" is clearly based on Erpenbeck's grandmother and Erpenbeck, therefore, is the "unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin."

herself called him "ein Kulissenschieber"—a scene shifter (100). Sandra Kohler also emphasizes the theater-like features of the novel, writing that "[i]t is as if the small area of wooded land were a stage, and the reader were watching the action unfold as the narrative traverses the 20th century" (138).

As Franziska Meyer argues in her investigation of Erpenbeck's biographical connections to the novel, *Heimsuchung* is Erpenbeck's attempt to rewrite her own family history. Yet, Meyer disagrees with arguments that frame *Heimsuchung* as a text documenting collective memory and she instead frames it as "ein autobiographischer Text, der nicht autobiographisch erzählt"[292] (324). This notion is supported by interviews in which Erpenbeck speaks of her childhood summers spent at her grandmother's cabin near the Scharmützelsee lake outside of Berlin. Erpenbeck recalls the quiet gardener from her childhood, noting that "[e]s gab diesen Gärtner tatsächlich. Er starb, als ich vielleicht vier oder fünf Jahre alt war. Ich fand ihn immer etwas unheimlich, weil er so wenig sprach"[293] (Huckebrink 42). Erpenbeck continues her remarks on the gardener, "[d]urch die Ruhe und Regelmäßigkeit, mit der er seien Arbeit verrichtet, verbindet er die Natur mit den Menschen"[294] (42). Before writing *Heimsuchung*, Erpenbeck committed herself to an extensive research project that traced the history of her grandparent's cabin and their neighbors. In a 2008 interview with *Die Zeit*, Erpenbeck recalls how the townspeople told her that their Jewish neighbors had safely escaped to Sweden during the

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[292] "an autobiographical text that does not narrate autobiographically."
[293] "This gardener actually did exist. He died when I was around four or five. I always found him a bit uncanny because he spoke so little"
[294] "Through the tranquility and regulatory with which he performed his work, he connected nature with humans."

Third Reich and she discovered only much later that the family was murdered in a concentration camp (Döbler).

Erpenbeck's complex novel has piqued the interest of scholars concerned with a number of topics, including memory, trauma, generational storytelling, gender relations and domestic spaces, as well as ecocriticism. Her focus on material objects distinguishes her writing and is a characteristic that Julia Schöll attributes to Erpenbeck's background in theater ("Wörter" 39). In Erpenbeck's 1999 novel, *Geschichte vom alten Kind* (*The Story of the Old Child*), the protagonist is a 14-year old girl who mysteriously appears on the street with no memory or past recollection, with only an empty pail in her hand. The orphaned girl is brought to a children's home and it is later revealed that she is in fact a full-grown woman.[295] Memories of childhood and a longing to return to youth are common themes for Erpenbeck, though in this case the girl who mysteriously appears has been read as a parable for the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), a state that suddenly emerges after the war without a past. The girl's only possession upon being found, the empty pail, symbolizes a potential future to be filled, with memories for the girl and history for the GDR.

While *Geschichte vom alten Kind* is an allegory for the emergence of the GDR, her 2009 collection of essays *Dinge, die verschwinden* (*Things that Disappear*) can be read as a eulogy for the country after German reunification. In the collection of thirty-one essays originally published as columns in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* Erpenbeck

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[295] This character is based on written correspondence between Erpenbeck's grandmother and a 14-year-old girl, who, in reality, was a 33-year-old woman (Eden, 17). Erpenbeck's attempt to find to find the woman failed. Instead, her research led her to pose as a high school student in a Berlin Gymnasium at the age of 27 (Huckebrink, 38).

explores material and abstract things that ceased to exist with the GDR, such as "Öfen und Kohle"[296] and "Das einfache Leben."[297] As Schöll rightly notes, the reader is often first confronted by the material reality, possessions, and spaces of the human figures in Erpenbeck's writing before discovering anything about the figures themselves ("Wörter" 37). Nonhuman, material objects often signify a meaning beyond the object itself, connecting to larger themes in history. In *Heimsuchung*, German history is a focal point and closely tied to Erpenbeck's exploration of the different temporal rhythms, which I interpret as being represented by humans, material objects and the nonhuman environment.

Heim and Heimsuchung

The novel's title *Heimsuchung* carries multiple meanings (unfortunately lost in the English translation *Visitation*), which supplement my reading of the book. The English translation of this word as *Visitation* conveys only one meaning of *Heimsuchung*: the visit of Mary and Elizabeth when they were both pregnant. At the same time, however, the word *Heimsuchung* signifies being struck suddenly by a stroke of bad luck or misfortune, as happens to most of the human figures in the novel. By extension, *Heimsuchung* also conveys a sense of haunting, a strong theme that runs through the entire novel filled with multiple forms of violence (wars, sexual assault, political

[296] "Ovens and coal."
[297] "The simple life."

persecution) and numerous victims (most notably women and Jews).[298] Schöll accurately concludes that the gardener seems to be the only figure who is not haunted, "weil er immer schon an diesem Ort und in der Zeit angekommen ist. Sein Verwachsensein mit der Dingwelt bildet den Punkt, an dem Mythos und Historie ineinandergreifen"[299] (44). Schöll suggests that the gardener's connection to the material world allows him to consistently inhabit the present, therefore removing the possibility of being haunted by the past. From a contemporary environmental perspective, Erpenbeck frames the deep past in *Heimsuchung* in a way similar to her depictions of the GDR—as something that once existed, but never will again.

Katharina Gerstenberger notes that the *heim* of the title furthermore relates to Freud's insights on the uncanny (*das unheimliche*). She writes that the uncanny "suggests a connection between the desire to create a place where one belongs and the incursion of catastrophe" (108-9). Additionally, the *unheimlich* of *Heimsuchung* is closely related to the uncanniness of inhabiting a space or place marred by a violent past, with the topos of

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[298] *Heimsuchung* additionally becomes haunting because of its textural specificity. The chapter "Das Mädchen" lists actual street names and is about a real person. The figure of Doris is based on Doris Kaplan, to whom *Heimsuchung* is dedicated, and whose murder is depicted in the chapter "Das Mädchen" (The Girl). Anke Biendarra comments on how including archival research emphasizes the meaning of individual lives; "Indem sie auf realen Fakten und Archivmaterial beruhendes Leben erzählt, betont Erpenbeck die Bedeutsamkeit jedes jüdisches Schicksals, das in seiner Einzigartigkeit erinnert werden soll" (136; "By narrating life based on real facts and archival materials, Erpenbeck emphasizes the significance of every Jewish fate that should be remembered in its uniqueness.). Doris's story is one of many featured in a permanent exhibition in Berlin called "Wir waren Nachbarn" (We were neighbors) that showcases pictures, documents and letters from Berlin's Jewish citizens who were forced to leave their homes. It's unclear where Erpenbeck discovered Doris's story.

[299] "because he has always already arrived at this place and in this time. His 'grown-togetherness' with the world of things creates the point in which myth and history intertwine."

the closet in the house as a fitting example of this. A small closet space in the house is where a rape occurs, but paradoxically provides needed shelter on a number of occasions. Broken into its component parts, *Heimsuchung* means the search for a home. German speakers recognize the combination of *Heim*, which means home or house, and *Suchung*—the noun form of the verb to search, *suchen*.

Yet, the question remains what the *Heim* of *Heimsuchung* is, because *Heim* means both home and house, and those terms are not identical in meaning. The novel depicts the complicated task of searching for a home and the (mostly unsuccessful) attempt of each character in the novel to make a home. For the architect, making a home is directly connected to a physical house. His profession underscores the close relationship between feeling at home in a place and being in a home. The architect has deep emotional commitment to building and claims that building adheres one's life to the earth; his view on a house is one that indicates permanence. His building principles resemble an environmental aesthetics because, he believes, "Das Haus sollte aussehen, als sei es hier gewachsen, wie etwas Lebendiges"[300] (42). The descriptions of the house as a living thing aligns with claims of material ecocriticism and its scholars who often turn to the concept of embodiment to theorize how the material and discursive realms connect. While the other figures in the novel are refused permanence, the architect fails to see that even the geologic formation of the lake and the earth itself are not permanent. As the prologue predicts, "…eines Tages würde [der See] auch wieder vergehen, denn, wie jeder

[300] "The house was to look as if it had just grown here like a living thing" (28).

See, war auch dieser nur etwas Zeitweiliges, wie jede Hohlform war auch diese Rinne zur dazu da, irgendwann wieder ganz und gar zugeschüttet zu werden"[301] (10-11).

Finally, the *Heim* in the title is also reminiscent of the concept of *Heimat*, a complicated notion denoting a person's connection to a certain place or ancestral home and a term that appears numerous times through the novel. The architect considers his occupation to be "Heimat planen,"[302] in ways extending beyond the material house to the more obscure concept (38). As we have seen, "die Schriftstellerin" felt cut off from her *Heimat* both geographically during her exile and morally as she learned of the events of the Holocaust. Axel Goodbody, a leading scholar of German ecocriticism, argues that Erpenbeck presents *Heimat* as "a precious state that can only ever be achieved temporarily and whose enjoyment has all too often been accompanied by disregard for the suffering of excluded others" ("Heimat" 138). While I agree with Goodbody that the relationships between humans and the nonhuman environment form a central theme in the novel, my interest does not lie in the isolated historical concept of *Heimat* per se, but rather in considering even more fully how Erpenbeck tells these nonhuman and human stories using narrative strategies that bring their disparate time scales together in ways that amplify their complex dimensions.

From Dark Times to Deep Time

For most of the human figures in the novel, however, the possibility of *Heim* as something solid and permanent is foreclosed as they are forced from places that are their

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[301] "one day it would vanish again, since, like every lake, it too was only temporary—like every hollow shape, this channel existed only to be filled in completely some day" (2).
[302] "planning a homeland" (24).

home and required to make a new home elsewhere, resulting in a sense of homelessness. Erpenbeck traces the many instances in which people are denied being at home and the connections to the persecution of certain people during the twentieth century. In particular, she focuses on the persecution of Jewish people and women. Beyond narrating historical events, Erpenbeck engages with various intellectual trends and, as we will see, exposes the close relationship between fascism and claims to being at home in certain spaces while excluding others.

The Jewish neighbors of the architect, for example, escape to South Africa and are forced to sell their house. In the chapter that tells this story, "Der Tuchfabrikant" (the cloth manufacturer), the setting alternates between the family's residence in Germany and their new home in South Africa. The words "Heim." and "Heil." are scattered throughout the prose in this chapter, posing a puzzle for the reader. With just one letter separating the two, their repetition highlights the precarious conditions of making a home—*Heim*—which can be broken off permanently as alluded to in this case with the use of *Heil* to signal the National Socialist greeting. Yet paradoxically, *heil* as an adjective can also convey a sense of safety, security and healing. In the passages that contrast Germany and South Africa, the words "Heil." and "Heim." stand alone, punctuated by periods that make the Nazi greeting indistinguishable from the adjective, which would otherwise be written in lower-case. These words only appear in the passages set in Germany before the family flees to South Africa, showing the ambivalence between feeling at home and feeling safe.

Likewise, "Die Schriftstellerin" (the writer) searches for a home in a subsequent chapter. The phrase she types on her typewriter, "I-c-h k-e-h-r-e h-e-i-m,"[303] is repeated five times as she grapples with the question of what and where home is (112). The lower-case spelling of *heim* indicates that it's used as an adverb meaning "toward home again" or even "in die Heimat zurück."[304] The adverbial *heim* suggests a temporal and physical direction and both of these meanings are present in the novel. The writer recalls a sentence from the diary of a German mayor of one of the regions of Poland annexed by Nazis, who writes that he wants to go home after finding out that Jewish residents in his town had been murdered while he was away: "… daheim hatte sich in die Zeit selbst verwandelt, die hinter ihm lag, Deutschland sich auf Nimmerwiedersehen in etwas Körperloses, in den verlorenen Geist, mit dem man alle jene Schrecken weder wußte, noch sich vorstellen mußte. H-e-i-m. Warte nur, balde"[305] (116). In contrast to the architect whose concept of home is a physically embodied dwelling, for the writer home is disembodied, "etwas Körperloses," and as such can be located in the past, as for the mayor, or even a literary space as for "die Schriftstellerin." The last lines of the passage, "Warte nur, balde,"[306] reference Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's famous nature poem "Wanderers Nachtlied." The short poem describes a sublime stillness across mountain

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[303] "I A-M G-O-I-N-G H-O-M-E" (86), literally, "I am returning home." The verb *heimkehren* evokes Peter Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr*.
[304] "back to the homeland."
[305] "Germany had been irrevocably transformed into something disembodied, a lost spirit that neither knew nor was forced to imagine all these horrific things. H-o-m-e. *Which though must leave ere long*" (89, original emphasis), Bernofsky replaces the Goethe quote in Erpenbeck's text with a Shakespeare sonnet.
[306] "just wait, soon."

tops and in the forest. The final line of the poem is "ruhest du auch"[307] and evokes that a sense of calm will also come over the reader (while also sounding somewhat ominous). For "die Schriftstellerin," *heim* becomes a literary home; it is one that she can revisit in certain texts or create in her own writing.

Through the figure of "die Schriftstellerin," who went into exile, "nicht wegen ihrer jüdischen Mutter… sondern als Kommunistin"[308] (117), Erpenbeck offers a perspective on the concept of home for exiles, especially for those people who fled Germany during World War II and watched their former home country turn into an unrecognizable place:

> Jene aber, die vor ihrer eigenen Verwandlung ins Ungeheure aus der Heimat geflohen waren, wurden durch das, was sie von zu Hause erfuhren, nicht nur für die Jahre der Emigrantin, sondern, wie es ihr inzwischen scheint, auf immer ins Unbehauste gestoßen, unabhängig davon, ob sie zurückkehrten oder nicht.[309] (116)

Exiles are described here as those who leave their *Heimat* before turning into monsters—"vor ihrer eigenen Verwandlung ins Ungeheure." They become homeless (*Unbehauste*—literally un-housed) by witnessing their former home transformed into something unknown and irretrievable in the aftermath of truly horrific violence. In addition to the metaphor of exiles, the expressive language used in this passage further complicates the

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[307] "you too shall rest."
[308] "not because of her Jewish mother but as a communist" (91).
[309] "Those others, though, the ones who had fled their homeland before they themselves could be transformed into monsters, were thrust into homelessness by the news that reached them from back home, not just for the years of their emigration but also, as seems clear to her now, for all eternity, regardless of whether or not they returned" (89).

notion of home. The adjective *ungeheuer* (monster; used here in its nominalized form as roughly "into monstrous beings") means "nicht geheuer," which is akin to "fishy" in English. *Geheuer* has etymological roots relating to *heim*, coming from the Middle High German *gehiure* meaning "nichts Unheimliches an sich habend"[310] ("Ungeheuer"). *Ungeheuer*, therefore, not only maintains its literal meaning of a monster, but also corresponds to *unheimlich* (uncanny). The use of the word *Unbehauste* is likewise compelling because the more common words for homeless would be *obdachlos* or even *heimatlos*. *Obdachlos* refers to having no literal shelter (a roof above someone) while *unbehaust* conveys a sense beyond not having a physical home—it is the condition of not being at home. The reference to Goethe that precedes these remarks on exile and homelessness make clear the ambivalence of *Heimat*; the literary and intellectual traditions from which the great poet Goethe emerged also gave rise to the barbarism of fascism the Holocaust.

Strikingly, Erpenbeck's rhetoric of exile, homelessness and the monsters of Nazi Germany resonates with the discourse of several Frankfurt School theorists, a group of thinkers and writers who also went into exile during the war. In particular, Erpenbeck's reflections on homelessness as experienced by "Die Schriftstellerin" evoke the discourse of Theodor W. Adorno, whose cultural critique revolves around a number of topics explored by Erpenbeck in *Heimsuchung*. One short text in particular, "Asyl für Obdachlose,"[311] develops a concept of homelessness as directly related to the idea of dwelling that is quite similar to the one articulated by Erpenbeck. In this aphorism from

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[310] "having nothing uncanny/sinister inherently"
[311] "Refuge for the homeless"

Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben,[312] a collection he wrote during exile in the US, Adorno reflects on the impossibility of being at home. Adorno declares that dwelling (*wohnen*) is no longer possible and "Das Haus ist vergangen"[313] (42). This sense of homelessness exists partly because the presumption of feeling at home in a house necessarily includes a betrayal of any knowledge of those who have suffered to make the house possible. Additionally, new construction or "tabula rasa" homes do not offer a solution because they, too, are devoid of a deep connection between house and its occupant, a condition that Adorno concludes leads to a similarly destructive end—"[zu] einer lieblosen Nichtachtung für die Dinge, die notwendig auch gegen die Menschen sich kehrt"[314] (43). For Adorno, a disregard for the integrity of material things is the first step toward a disregard for humans.

Amplifying a sentiment from Nietzsche about the joy of not owning a home, Adorno adds that "…es gehört zur Moral, nicht bei sich selber zu Hause zu sein."[315] With this comment on morality, Adorno provides an answer to central question of what *Heimsuchung* means. To ask whether it is possible to be at home in the world has a stark answer: it is immoral to be at home. Adorno ends the aphorism with a line that we can use to illustrate a major theme of *Heimsuchung*; "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen."[316] "Die Schriftstellerin" finds power in writing because it makes it possible for her to work against such wrong life. She explains her hopes of restoring Germany to the

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[312] *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*.
[313] "The house is past" (39), translations from E.F.N. Jephcott.
[314] "a loveless disregard for things which necessarily turns against people too" (39).
[315] "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's own home" (39).
[316] "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (39).

place that she once recognized as her Heimat. Erpenbekc writes, "…mit dieser Schreibmaschine hatte sie all die Worte getippt, die die deutschen Barbaren zurückverwandeln sollten in Menschen und die Heimat in Heimat"[317] (114). These words echo the famous statement Adorno made in his essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" where he writes "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch"[318] (31). For "die Schriftstellerin," there is salvation in writing and creating. It is notable that while in exile in Russia, "die Schriftstellerin" and her husband had to seek shelter during their attempt to escape; a poet who now lives with his wife on the other side of the lake had provided them a place to hide (118).

In contrast to "die Schriftstellerin," whose writing instantiates Adorno's paradox of being at home in the world, the architect's sentiments resonate with German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger spent most of his time in a small cabin in Todtnauberg, which is similar to the architect's connection to the lake house in *Heimsuchung*.[319] It is well known that Heidegger was a member of the Nazi party, but until recently this unfortunate association was considered by many as separate from his philosophy (Alweiss 306). However, after his "Black Notebooks" were published in 2014, it was revealed that his thinking was indeed deeply anti-Semitic.[320] The architect in

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[317] "with this typewriter she had typed all the words that were to transform the German barbarians back into human being sand her homeland back into a homeland" (88).
[318] "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (33), translation from Samuel and Shierry Weber.
[319] See Adam Sharr's *Heidegger's Hut*.
[320] As Lilian Alweiss notes in her review of the published Black Notebooks: "We want Heidegger – one of the key thinkers of 20th century philosophy – to acknowledge the atrocities that were happening around him in the name of the German people. We are looking for a moral or ethical response. Yet there is none, not in Heidegger's work nor coming from Heidegger, the man" (316).

Heimsuchung was a member of Albert Speer's Germania project and would later become a member of the *Reichskulturkammer*, albeit by having to hide his Jewish ancestry.[321] For the architect, a concept *Heim* is tied to physical space. He refers to a house as "die dritte Haut"[322] (after flesh and clothes) (38), and remarks that, "Wer baut, klebt nun einmal sein Leben an die Erde. Dem Bleiben einen Körper zu geben, ist sein Beruf"[323] (42). The connection between the question of dwelling on the earth and twentieth-century thought is inextricable. By grappling with major themes of twentieth century intellectual history, Erpenbeck engages with a critique of modernity that can also be read in terms of human's relationship with the environment.

Focalization and Narrativity

Looking at the examples above, which articulate recognizably different viewpoints on dwelling and feeling at home, we can clearly see that *Heimsuchung*'s layered chapter structure enables Erpenbeck to present a variety of distinct perspectives through the narrative technique of focalization. The human lives depicted in *Heimsuchung* span the twentieth century and go beyond it, and each chapter details the violence of its time. Because the time of the novel also extends far into the deep past, it's important to investigate two pivotal narrative elements—focalization and storyworld—to understand

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[321] The architect was initially denied entry into the *Reichskulturkammer* because he first marked that he did not have Aryan ancestry. An old school colleague let him fill out the form again after informing the architect that the did not have to take his great-grandparents into account.
[322] "your third skin" (24).
[323] "Someone who builds something is affixing his life to the earth. Embodying the act of staying put is his profession" (28).

how Erpenbeck combines human perspectives with the scale of the deep past and engages multiple perspectives.

Each chapter that is not focused on the gardener is strategically focalized through the perspective of a different inhabitant of the place and the reader learns how each person is connected to the land and interconnected with others. Beyond creating the book's stratigraphic structure by accumulating these layered perspectives, the careful focalization provides insight into the real human violence and suffering of the twentieth century that is otherwise in danger of being rendering invisible within the vast scale of geologic time. In the chapter "Der Großbauer und seine vier Töchter" ("The Wealthy Farmer and His Four Daughters"), for example, after the father finds out his second oldest daughter had a relationship with a seasonal worker, he locks her in the smokehouse for days until she has a miscarriage. In addition, the youngest daughter dies by suicide after years of psychological issues. All four women are denied their inheritance to the land. In the chapter "Der Rotarmist," the reader learns about a young soldier who joined the military when he was fifteen after his sister and parents were killed by the Germans (95). Though the chapters are short, Erpenbeck use of focalization intensifies their impact on the novel's human story from the distinct perspective of the numerous human figures. Because focalization compels the reader to "experience" the events from the perspective of a certain figure, the poignant chapters provoke an emotional response from the reader.

Looking closely at topics in narrative theory and focalization in particular, we can see how Erpenbeck plays with narrative structures and conventions in *Heimsuchung*. Moreover, Erpenbeck's geologic focus reveals distinct narrative aspects that are of interest to ecocritical scholarship. Debates surrounding focalization in narrative theory

attempt to differentiate focalization from traditional understandings of what is achieved through point of view. The term focalization was first proposed by the literary theorist Gérard Genette in 1972 to explain the difference between the terms "point of view" and "perspective." Since Genette, the concept of focalization has been at the center of numerous debates in narrative theory. In general, focalization is understood to be the filtering of events from a specific narrative perspective or focalizor. Mieke Bal, for instance, expands Genette's concept by distinguishing between the narrator as the figure who speaks and the focalizor as the figure who sees. While every story is told from a certain point of view, focalization is the selection (or restriction) of certain aspects of the narration through a particular character. Focalization differs from point of view in its preciseness—every story is told from a point of view by a narrator, while focalization determines more specifically what information is included in the narrative.[324] The focalizor can be roughly determined by asking the questions of "who sees?" and "who speaks?" The figure who speaks is the narrator and the one who sees is the focalizor. Many scholars take issue with the primacy of the visual of focalization (the question of who sees), signaling further possibilities for examining focalization that are of interest to ecocriticism, like the potential of nonhuman narrators and focalizors, an element that Erpenbeck plays with and that I will explore shortly.

Seymour Chatman, regarded as a leading scholar of narratology in the 1980s-1990s, rejected the term focalization and instead purposed the terms slant and filter in his 1990 book *Coming to Terms*: *The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. For

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[324] See Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* for a detailed discussion of focalization and narrative agents.

Chatman, narrators cannot experience the storyworld of the text directly: they can only "re-report" what characters tell them. In the case of a homodiegetic narrator (a narrator who is part of the story) who has witnessed or participated in events firsthand, Chatman argues that such a narrator nevertheless recounts events from a different position. He distinguishes between the character and narrator, even if they are one in the same, arguing that:

> It is high time that we introduce a terminological distinction between these two loci of "point of view": that of the narrator, and that of the character. I propose *slant* to name the narrator's attitudes and other mental nuances appropriate to report function of discourse, and *filter* to name the much wider range of mental activity experienced by characters in the story world—perceptions, cognitions, attitudes, emotions, memories, fantasies, and the like. (143)

Slant, according to Chatman, denotes the narrator's attitude and can be implicit or explicit. It is, therefore, a function of discourse (the way in which events are retold), rather than story (the sequence of events that occurs). Filter, by contrast, is "the mediating function of a character's consciousness" and is connected to any number of characters in the storyworld, not only the narrator (144).

Furthermore, Chatman introduces a broader definition of what narrative is that stands in opposition to the basic distinction of diegesis (telling, narrating) versus mimesis (showing). This ultimately leads him to the possibility of nonhuman narrators. In his hierarchical presentation of different types of texts, Chatman situates prose fiction narratives as a "text-type" that differs from three main types of texts (argument, description and other) because of its double temporal logic—by this he means that both

discourse and story are temporally bound. Chatman's framework is a reworking of what Günter Müller identifies as the distinction between *Erzählzeit* (time of narration), which is the measurable duration of a story's narration and can be counted in words, pages, or time it takes to read a text, and *erzählte Zeit* (narrated time), which is the span of time that is narrated in the story (114). These categories are important, because once narrative is set apart from the other text-types, Chatman can pursue further analysis of narrative strategies and introduce the distinction between diegesis and mimesis as a fundamental characteristic of narrative texts.

Following Chatman's analysis, we can conclude that a mimetic text has a "show-er" similar to the "tell-er" (a narrator, a voice) of a diegetic narrative. By making the "diegesis versus mimesis" distinction of a secondary order (rather than the primary defining feature of a narrative), Chatman opens the possibility of nonhuman narrators. That is, the "show-er" of a mimetic narrative is not bound to language in the same way as a narrator or "tell-er" of a diegetic narrative and therefore does not have to be human. Chatman defines a mimetic narrative as allowing "for the recognition of a kind of narration that is not performed by a recognizable human agency" and argues "that human personality is not a sine qua non for narratorhood" (115). Of interest to material ecocriticism and geologic narration is Chatman's positive discussion of nonhuman agency, a concept which he acknowledges makes some scholars uncomfortable.

Though he focuses on narratives, Chatman's remarks on agency resonate with current debates in environmental humanities and material ecocriticism, in particular when he calls the idea of non-narrated narratives "a misguided effort to restrict 'agency' to human beings" (116). Instead, Chatman writes:

> I would argue that every narrative is by definition narrated—that is, narratively presented—and that narration, narrative presentation, entails an agent even when the agent bears no signs of human personality. Agency is marked etymologically by the -er/-or suffix attached to the verbs "present" or "narrate." The suffix means either "agent" or "instrument," and neither need be human. (115-116)

In subsequent comments, it becomes clear that Chatman has computers and machines in mind as potential nonhuman narrators.[325] Nevertheless, his remarks show that the questions raised by material ecocriticism are deeply intertwined with those posed by earlier narrative theory. Certainly, Chatman's ideas can be expanded and applied to contemporary discussions of the nonhuman.

It is clear that questions of narrative theory and nonhuman narrators in particular are of interest to ecocriticism, yet there have been very few scholars of ecocriticism who have engaged extensively with narrative theory. Erin James, however, does, bringing ecocriticism and narrative theory together in her innovative book *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, in which she comprehensively expands on the concept of storyworlds first proposed by David Herman. A narrative's storyworld is defined by Herman as "mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which interpreters relocate as they work to comprehend a narrative," and James repositions it as an "inherently *environmental* process" (xi, original emphasis). James claims the concept of storyworlds as an

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[325] He writes, "In this age of mechanical and electronic production and reproduction, of 'smart' machines, it would be rather naïve to reject the notion of nonhuman narrative agency" (116).

"especially promising ecocritical reading strategy for antimimetic and nonrealist texts that, on their surface, appear to have little interest in representing the environment yet still offer readers the textual cues they require to transport themselves to an alternative space and time" (xii). Furthermore, she asserts that storyworlds "are always mediated by someone (a narrator or focalizing character) and are thus necessarily imagined representations of material realties" (xii). The concept of a storyworld is crucial to *Heimsuchung*, since the novel ultimately is about the storyworld of the lake, which is established through the various focalized perspectives.

In *Heimsuchung*, Erpenbeck uses focalization to investigate unique human perspectives of the twentieth century. As a narrative strategy, the numerous strata of focalization she employs serve to emphasize the dissonance between who sees (the focalizor) and who speaks (the narrator). Erpenbeck frequently plays with the trope of sight in *Heimsuchung*, demonstrating the limitations of restricting experience to the visual. The chapter "Der Kinderfreund," for example, enacts the emphasis of sight in focalization as connected to certain points in time. "Der Kinderfreund" was the childhood best friend of the "unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin" and he recalls the time he spent at the lake house as a child with the "unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin." The two were inseparable friends during the summer vacation of their youth. While he lived near the lake year-round, she only spent summers there. Here, the narration happens in the "present" moment, but is focalized through the childhood the eyes of the figure of "der Kinderfreund," a name that foregrounds the childhood perspective. While the narrator and character of the chapter are clearly separate, the events and emotions of the chapter are focalized through "der Kinderfreund" at multiple points in time. The two were bound

together by witnessing the disturbing rape of a twelve-year-old girl by a cousin and the narrator describes the lasting effect of witnessing the brutality of this rape, with a focus on sight: "Die Augen, mit denen er und sie damals im Holzschuppen etwas gesehen haben, was sie besser nicht hätten sehen sollen, stecken ja noch immer in ihren Köpfen, mögen die Köpfe inzwischen auch rein räumlich weit voneinander entfernt sein. Das Sehen von damals dauert ja immer noch an"[326] (162-163). Erpenbeck plays with the visual emphasis of focalization; what the two witnessed as children still remains with them in the present moment of narration.

The close connection with sight in discussions about focalization, however, becomes an issue when sight is limited or entirely absent. In *The Storyworld Accord*, James notes the possibility of combining the perspectives of trans-corporeality—Stacy Alaimo's concept that views the body as interconnected with material flows—with the findings of narrative theorists working against the "ocular bias" of focalization (162).[327] Erpenbeck plays with the connections between focalization, the visual and the body in the chapter "Das Mädchen" that depicts the twelve-year-old Doris. Unlike her aunt and uncle, Doris and her parents cannot make their planned escape from Nazi Germany and Doris's parents and grandparents are murdered in concentration camps. Doris, however, hides in a small closet in a Warsaw apartment until she is discovered by a German solider and eventually murdered. In the short chapter, Erpenbeck combines focalization and

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[326] "The eyes with which he and she saw something that day in the woodshed that it would have been better for them not to see, are still right there in their heads after all, even though these heads are meanwhile, seen in purely spatial terms, far removed from one another" (128).
[327] See Christian Huck and Daniel Punday for more on the ocular bias of focalization.

spatialization to depict the events of the Holocaust through perspective of a twelve-year-old girl. This chapter is especially compelling since it provides an example of Erpenbeck's use of focalization that is not limited to sight because she includes trans-corporeal aspects that James alludes to. The way the reader comes to understand the events taking place is not through Doris's eyes, but through her body. As the narrator describes, Doris hides in complete darkness: "Rings um sie ist alles schwarz und der Kern dieser schwarzen Kammer ist sie"[328] (79). The narrative, thus, deprives both Doris and the reader of the sense of sight in the chapter. Therefore, instead of representing the space visually, Erpenbeck focalizes and represents the space corporally, giving clues to the confines of the space through the physicality of Doris's body. In the absence of sight, Doris gradually loses the ability to perceive time since there is nothing that visually records change; "Während sie auf der kleinen Kiste sitzt… vergeht Zeit. Wahrscheinlich vergeht Zeit"[329] (79).

Instead of describing the dimensions of Doris's hiding space or the passage of time, the narrator reduces descriptions to observations based on Doris's body located within the space. This corporeal account is easy for the reader to imagine around her own body, given the spatialization of the closet that is central to the chapter. Doris sits on a small crate, with her knees knocking against the wall across from her and she is only able to move her legs a small amount; "manchmal nach rechts, manchmal nach links"[330] (79).

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[328] "All around her everything is black, and the core of this black chamber is she herself" (58).
[329] "While she sits on the little crate… time is passing. Probably time is passing" (58).
[330] "now to the right, now to the left" (58).

The narrator describes the confines of the space again, relating the lack of light with the imperceptibility of time:

> Während das Mädchen in seiner schwarzen Kammer sitzt und von Zeit zu Zeit versucht, sich aufzurichten, dabei aber mit dem Kopf gegen die Decke des Verstecks stößt, während es die Augen weit aufmacht und dennoch nicht einmal die Wände seiner Kammer sehen kann, während die Dunkelheit so groß ist, daß das Mädchen nicht einmal erkennen kann, wo sie aufhört, erscheinen in seinem Kopf Erinnerungen…[331] (81)

The corporeal descriptors create a tangible representation of a hiding space so small that even a young girl can't stretch out. While the space of the chamber is uncomfortably cramped, the expansive element is the darkness. In this way, the sense of vast uncertainty that results from the lack of sight counters the primacy of visual perception for narratives and the corporeal depiction of the hiding space stand in for the "seeing" that is central to focalization. Therefore, there is no one who sees. Instead, by virtue of the fact that Erpenbeck focalizes this chapter through the perspective of Doris's body, the reader gains of sense of the claustrophobic space corporeally.

Without light to see and thus lacking the ability to apprehend the passing of time, Doris's head is instead flooded with memories that are described as colorful; "Farbig ist nur noch das, woran sie sich erinnert, mitten in dieser Dunkelheit, die sie umgibt, deren

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[331] "As the girl sits there in her dark chamber and from time to time tries to straighten up but keeps knocking her head against the ceiling of her hiding place, as she opens her eyes but nevertheless cannot even see the walls of her chamber, as the darkness is so great that the girl can't even recognize where her body stops, her head is visited by memories…" (59).

Kern sie ist, farbige Erinnerungen hat sie in ihrem vom Licht vergessenen Kopf, Erinnerungen von jemand, der sie einmal war"[332] (80). Her memories are, indeed, colorful and are striking in contrast to the darkness. Again, the question of the focalizor is complicated when the person who sees is deprived of sight. Erpenbeck contrasts the actual and symbolic darkness of her present situation with colorful and expansive scenes from her memories. Schubert writes that, "[d]ie Imagination des Hauses ist so stark, dass sie dem Kind noch eine innere Zeit des Überlebens schenkt in Form der Erinnerungsbildern, in denen es noch von sich als lebendigem Menschen weiß"[333] (97). Although the descriptions of the space are provided by a heterodiegtic narrator, they are vividly focalized through Doris through the descriptions of her body in space.

In a final, tragic instance, time and the body are connected again. The only indication of time passing in the dark closet is that Doris needs to urinate, "Jetzt muß sie pinkeln, aber sie darf nicht aus der Kammer hinausgehen…"[334] (84). Eventually, she does urinate and because the floor of the house where she hides is not completely level, urine flows from her closet to form a small pool on the floor and ultimately leads to her discovery by German soldiers.[335] In an analysis of this sequence, Meyer argues that the physical body enclosed in a space presents another way of knowing a space (332). The small, cramped spaces and the role of bodily fluid connects Doris with the wife of the

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[332] "The only thing here that has color is what she remembers in the midst of all this darkness surrounding her, whose core she is, she harbors colorful memories in her light-forsaken head, memories belonging to someone she once was" (58-59).
[333] "The imagination of the house is so strong that it gives the child an internal time of survival in the form of memories, in which she still knows herself as a living person."
[334] "Now she has to pee, but she cannot leave the chamber" (62).
[335] The pool of urine is described as a small lake; contrast the formation of this small lake with the formation of the lake at the center of the novel.

architect, though they are years and hundreds of miles apart. In chapters prior to and following "Das Mädchen," a small closet becomes the setting for a disturbing rape scene involving the architect's wife and a Red Army officer and later it becomes the hiding place for the "unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin" when she hides from the realtor (180). Erpenbeck's playful use of focalization provides multiple perspectives and also shows the need for more nuanced analytical approaches than offered by an understanding of focalization that relies solely on sight.

Materialisms: Material Ecocriticism, Stratification, and Temporality

Inextricably intertwined with the human stories told in the novel is another story—the natural history of the land. The prologue of Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* provides a fitting example for examining the narrative dimensions of nonhuman matter that extends into the deep past. While the human stories in the novel span a century, Erpenbeck also tells a story that reaches into the geologic past and occupies a much greater time scale. Additionally, the geologic story includes nonhuman entities as the agents and actors. What interests me in the juxtaposition of human stories and nonhuman stories of the deep past is how Erpenbeck navigates their different temporalities. In order to investigate this question, I will first consider how the passing of time is told in the novel and will then turn to the book's prologue to show that the story is literally grounded in the geologic past. I consider the narrative strategies that Erpenbeck employs to tell this story and explore how theories of material ecocriticism are useful for comprehending such nonhuman stories.

Humans' comprehension of time is closely tied to visual perception because changes in our surroundings signal that time passes. In *Heimsuchung*, the gardener's

seasonal work and the changing occupants of the house clue the reader into the passing of time in familiar intervals and patterns, like seasons (for the gardener) or generations (for the occupants/inheritors). Geologic time, by contrast, is not as familiar and more difficult to for the reader to trace, especially within the limits of human perception. In the prologue describing the lake's formation, specific time indicators are given in the text: "vor ungefähr vierundzwanzigtausend Jahren,"[336] "vor etwa achtzehntausend Jahren"[337] and "Jahren, Jahrzehnten, Jahrhunderten"[338] (9). These precise markings of time periods stand out in contrast to the rest of the novel, where time indicators like specific years or days are noticeably absent. Instead, the reader must construct an approximation of time based on the social and political changes that force occupants to move away.

The prologue is striking for how it tells of the dynamic forces of nonhuman nature and also how it functions to situate this complex narrative as part of the larger story as the novel unfolds. Scholars working with theories of material ecocriticism consider both how nonhuman entities are agents of change and how these nonhuman changes exist within narrative dimensions—that is, as "storied" matter. Serenella Iovino explains that by storied matter she means that "matter's dynamism is 'sedimented' in a temporal dimension and can be known accordingly" ("Living Diffractions" 74). Erpenbeck's prologue is a telling of such sedimentation with actors that are all nonhuman; the ice moves and grinds rock, the animals are forced south to warmer climates. In the first line of the prologue, the active role of the ice in forming the lake and the amount of time

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[336] "Approximately twenty-four thousand years ago" (1).
[337] "approximately eighteen thousand years ago" (2).
[338] "years, decades and centuries" (1).

accounted for in one sentence are both striking: "Bis zum Felsmassiv, das inzwischen nur noch als sanfter Hügel oberhalb des Hauses zu sehen ist, schob sich vor ungefähr vierundzwanzigtausend Jahren das Eis vor"[339] (1). In this sentence, the ability of the ice to act on its own is highlighted; the subject of the sentence is the ice, which completes the action of the verb *sich vorschieben* (to push oneself forward). The ice pushes (itself) forward; the reflexive pronoun *sich* reinforces that the ice is the main actor in these processes. The next sentences highlight the power of the ice, describing how it crushes oak, alder and pine trees.

Building on the previous discussion of focalization, we can see that asking the questions of who sees and who speaks only further complicates this inquiry. The storyworld in the prologue is created visually, by a narrator that, in these first sentences, can somehow see the house above the hill and describe the glacial movements from twenty-four thousand years ago. The word *inzwischen* (meanwhile) is a temporal deixis, meaning that it makes sense only in relation to another point in time. In this case, the *inzwischen* situates the reader in the present moment where the house can also be seen ("das inzwischen nur noch als sanfter Hügel oberhalb des Hauses zu sehen ist"[340]). While the scale associated with words like *Felsmassiv* and twenty thousand years ago seem exceedingly immense to the reader, the *inzwischen* closes the gap by also situating the reader in a more familiar space—that of a house. The massive temporal change is furthermore manifested visually in the difference between the rocky cliff (of the deep

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[339] "a glacier advanced until it reached a large outcropping of rock that now is nothing more than a gentle hill above where the house stands" (1).
[340] "that now is nothing more than a gentle hill above where the house stands" (1).

past) and the gentle hill (of the present), tracing the material changes in the land over tens of thousands of years.

Throughout the prologue, the ice is a dynamic and powerful entity; it is the main agent of change and Erpenbeck emphasizes its agency by using language that compares it to a body. The parallel language between the glacier and a body partly arises from similarities in terminology that describe "die Zungen des Gletschers"[341] or "alle seine südlicheren Glieder,"[342] and other instances that highlight the agency of the ice mass and its ability to change the surrounding environment (10). The prologue's narrator chronicles how part of the glacier melts and begins to form the water cycle that sustains life throughout the novel: "Vom Körper, zu dem es einst gehört hatte, abgeschnitten und eingesperrt in die Rinnen, taute dieses Eis erst viel später, etwa um dreizehntausend vor Beginn der christlichen Zeitrechnung wurde es wieder Wasser, versickerte in der Erde, verdunstete zwischen Himmel und Erde zu kreisen"[343] (10). This passage alternates between static and fluid imagery, illustrating the ice's many multiple states of existence. The ice that is trapped in the channel becomes "verwaistes Eis"[344] and "Toteis"[345] and would later melt to form the lake (10). Then, as the ice melts into water, the water joins the weather system; the ice "[wurde] wieder Wasser, versickerte in der Erde, verdunstete

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[341] "the glacier's tongues" (2).
[342] "all its southernmost limbs" (2).
[343] "Cut off from the body it had once belonged to and trapped in these channels, this ice melted only much later. Approximately thirteen thousand years before the start of the Common Era, it turned back into water, seeped into the earth, evaporated in the air and then rained back down again, circulating in the form of water between heaven and earth" (2).
[344] "orphaned ice" (2).
[345] "dead ice" (2).

in der Luft und regnete wieder herab, als Wasser begann es, zwischen Himmel und Erde zu kreisen"[346] (10). The ice's agency is again highlighted and changes in the deep past are shown as dynamic as the ice becomes water and part of a greater hydrological cycle that remains deeply connected to life today. The ice-turned-water circulates between the earth and sky, continuing the comparison with the body and the circulation system. As the blood flowing through the human body is the animating force of human life, the circulation of the water into rain is a necessary condition for life to be sustained on the lake and for the trees and plants to which the gardener tends.[347]

Scholars in material ecocriticism partly aim to decenter the human in stories, yet they do not reject anthropomorphism or comparisons to humans. Iovino and Opperman, for instance, suggest that anthropomorphism exposes symmetries between humans and nonhumans rather than indicating an anthropocentric hierarchy ("Models of Narrativity" 82). James agrees that anthropomorphism does not necessarily imply anthropocentrism. Along with Iovino and Opperman, she argues that anthropomorphism "stresses the horizontal relationship between humans and their nonhuman counterparts" (32).[348] Looking at the example of the ice in the prologue of *Heimsuchung*, Erpenbeck's framing of the glacier as a body similarly opens up interpretive possibilities for understanding

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[346] "turned back into water, seeped into the earth, evaporated in the air and then rained back down again, circulating in the form of water between heaven and earth" (2).
[347] The focus on rain is unsurprising in a material ecocriticism context. See Lowell Duckert, "When It Rains." Parallels to Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, whose protagonist is trapped in a valley by rain and a flash flood.
[348] Personification can be equally productive in generating a storyworld, as Alexa Weik von Mossner notes in an example of John Muir's nature writing, stating that his use of personification "contributes to the vivacity of the events he describes, allowing readers to understand on a visceral level the dynamism of nature" (35).

nonhuman matter as powerful agents of change, which is a contrast to contemporary representation of melting and receding glaciers.

The comparison Erpenbeck makes between ice and a body furthermore helps to make the otherwise imperceptible geologic changes she describes accessible to human apprehension. In the following passage, the references to the body and the action of the ice stand out against the dramatic backdrop of geologic time:

> Während [das Eis] über Jahrtausende hinweg seinen riesigen kalten Körper nur zentimeterweise ausstreckte oder herumschob, schliff es die Felsbrocken unter sich allmählich rund. In wärmeren Jahren, Jahrzehnten, Jahrhunderten schmolz das Wasser an der Oberfläche des Eisblockes ein wenig, und glitt an Stellen, an denen der Sand unter dem Eis leicht fortzuspülen war, unter den schweren riesigen Leib. [349] (9)

Its agency is highlighted with the descriptions of the ice as giant and heavy and the use of two words that both mean body—*Körper* and *Leib*—add to the emphasis. While the word *Körper* is borrowed from the Latin *corpus*, *Leib* has etymological roots connected to the word *Leben* (life, to live) and therefore marks the body of ice as something incarnate. The ice is both an embodiment and a living form. In comparison to the timespan of decades and centuries, the ice as a body and its movement only centimeters at a time is a more accessible metaphor that illuminates the agency of the nonhuman. The active verbs in the

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[349] "While over a period of millennia it stretched out or shifted its enormous cold body only a centimeter at a time, it gradually was polishing the rocky surface beneath until it was round and smooth" (1).

sentence—*ausstrecken* (to spread out), *herumschieben* (to push around), *schliffen* (to grind)—all highlight the powerful agency of the ice.

Like a human body, the ice also rests, and the narrator describes this rest as work. Because of the massive time scale, what appears imperceptible to the human as sleep is, in fact, action: "…und das Eis begann seine Arbeit, den Schlaf"[350] (9). This shifts the idea of work away from a human-centered notion of motion and action. Instead, the ice's power is more dormant. For example, though it is very much vibrant, the piece of the glacier that eventually melts and forms the small lake is called *Toteis* (this refers to a piece of a glacier cut off from the rest).

An important transformation documented in the prologue is the creation of the sand that forms the bottom of the lake by the glacier. In a subsequent passage, Erpenbeck focuses on how sand is formed and in doing so she highlights that sand, too, has a history. Additionally, she shows how the sand, in combination with water and other nonhuman forces, shapes the underwater mountains in the lake. She writes, "Der Sand, den das Wasser selbst von Felsen gerieben hatte, als es noch Eis war, rutschte jetzt hier und da von den Seiten in diesen See und sank auf dessen Grund, so bildeten sich an manchen Stellen unterseeische Berge, an anderen Stellen blieb das Wasser so tief, wie die Rinne ursprünglich war"[351] (10). Erpenbeck describes sand as the product of the water grinding on the rock—the water that was once ice. The narrator actively calls attention to the

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[350] "and the ice began its labor, a labor of sleep" (1).

[351] "The sand that the water itself had ground from the rock when it was still ice now slid into this lake and sank to the bottom, and so at several points underwater mountains were formed, while in other spots the water remained as deep as the channel itself had originally been" (2).

changes and flows at work in creating a landscape often perceived as static. This passage is also important for how it connects the sand, water and ice to the form "underwater mountains" that return in following chapters.

Erpenbeck draws attention to the interconnection of time and space through the repetition of the noun *Rinne* and the verb *rinnen*. The noun *Rinne* (pl. *Rinnen*) is a channel or a gorge, like those carved out over time by glaciers and moving ice in the prologue. As a channel, a *Rinne* is a hollow form carved out over time; what is perceived as emptiness is in fact a marking of the passing of time. The glacial ice in the prologue burrows channels where it melts during warmer years—"…wo es, schmelzend, in wärmeren Jahren Rinnen unter sich in den Boden gegraben hatte…"[352] (9)—and gets trapped in deep channels when the earth begins to warm. One of the pieces of dead ice that remains "eingesperrt in die Rinnen"[353] goes on to melt and form the lake. In the short prologue, which is just over two pages long, the word *Rinne[n]* is conspicuously repeated six times, cueing the reader to its significance. In the chapter "Das Mädchen," Doris is discovered in her hiding spot because of a small stream of urine—*ein Rinnsal*—that flows from her hiding place and forms a puddle on the kitchen floor (89). While her memories of the lake transport the reader to that storyworld, Doris's material self remains back in Warsaw and the puddle of urine jolts the reader back to the disturbing reality she faces.

Moreover, the verb *rinnen*—to flow—recurs in the chapter on the architect's wife to describe the quick passing of time. The verb is repeated seven times in one sentence

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[352] "where in warmer years, it had carved channels in the ground as it melted" (1).
[353] "trapped in these channels" (2).

describing how her life goes by unvaryingly, the narrator emphasizes how "die Zeit rinnt fortwährend aus"[354] (75). In the prologue, the narration continues by inverting common conceptions of natural formations and positioning geologic changes as something ephemeral, again with the emphasis on *Rinne*: "…aber eines Tages würde [der See] auch wieder vergehen, den, wie jeder See, war auch dieser nur etwas zeitweiliges, wie jede Hohlform war auch diese Rinne nur dazu da, irgendwann wieder ganz und gar zugeschüttet zu werden"[355] (10-11).

Erpenbeck's emphasis on the word *rinnen* and its derivative forms leads me to two conclusions about the material dimensions and stories of *Heimsuchung*. The first is that the verb *rinnen* was chosen to focus the reader's attention on material flows that would perhaps otherwise go unnoticed yet deeply impact humans. Erpenbeck's attention to material flows aligns with the views of scholars of material ecocriticism and Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality in particular. Alaimo explains the concept as a "sense of the human as substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" ("States" 476). Indeed, as is the case with the small puddle of urine that leads Doris to be discovered, Erpenbeck carefully articulates the connections between humans and the nonhuman world. Furthermore, by linking *rinnen* to the flows of time as she does with the architect's wife, Erpenbeck additionally highlights that these material flows exist in a temporal dimension. Secondly, Erpenbeck's emphasis on *rinnen*

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[354] "time has been draining away" (55), literally "time has been draining continually away."
[355] "but one day it would vanish again, since, like every lake, it too was only temporary—like every hollow shape, this channel existed only to be filled in completely someday" (2).

in the prologue serves to underscore the fact that a tangible record of material flows existed prior to humans and functions as a trace narrative of the material past. As I explain in the next section, the mysterious gardener indelibly connects the human story in the novel to the geologic past.

The Gardener

The figure of the gardener links the human and nonhuman stories in the novel by bridging the temporal gap between the fraught present and the deep geologic past. Insights from material ecocriticism are helpful for understanding Erpenbeck's depiction of the gardener's work as engaging with the "storied matter" of the deep past and discerning the extent to which he is deeply connected to the material world. Before looking more closely at the gardener's connection to the deep past, we can consider the novel's complex temporal dimensions. Literary scholar Ulrike Vedder traces lineage and inheritance in the novel and shows how familial relationships constitute a mode of temporality distinct from the time of nature or material objects. Vedder identifies three different modes of time at work in Heimsuchung. First is the man-made time of clocks, schedules, and regulations, that imply death, aging and change. Then there is the time of nature, which is cyclical and repetitive. Finally, there is the time of material things that often outlive humans and highlight human mortality (62). While Vedder is interested in these multiple time structures as they relate to the "messy genealogies" of the novel, what concerns me is the unique way in which the gardener inhabits and connects all three types. In my view, deep time of the geologic past must be added to Vedder's list because it forms the literal foundation of the novel (in the prologue) and runs throughout the novel as the geological substrata is uncovered by the gardener in his work. Geologic time

extends far beyond the human into the deep past, yet as a concept, it remains distinctly human.

The gardener's seasonal work and the changing occupants of the house signal the passage of time according to familiar intervals and patterns. Geologic time, by contrast, is more difficult for the reader to trace because it exceeds the finite limits of human perception. Nonetheless it surfaces in the novel through the gardener's uncovering of the earth's layers. Focalization through the gardener's presence accomplishes the connection of the two. As the character focus of alternate chapters, the gardener occupies an important position, although both his origins and his eventual disappearance remain a mystery to the townspeople and the reader. The first sentence about him already situates him as an enigmatic figure; "Woher er gekommen ist, weiß im Dorf niemand. Vielleicht war er immer schon da"[356] (13). In contrast to the others, he remains outside the societal norms, political changes and military occupations that force others from the land, making him a nearly constant presence throughout the novel. Instead of fearing the incursion of troops, for instance, he worries about the invasion of the potato beetle. As Schubert notes, however, he cannot prevent the violence that befalls the other inhabitants (99). For the reader, the constant return in the narrative to his care of the property provides a sense of normalcy and relief that interrupts the violence depicted in other chapters. In addition, the chapters focused on him produce a common thread between the separate figures, weaving together their chronologically ambiguous narratives.

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[356] "No one in the village knows where he comes from. Perhaps he was always here" (3).

Thus, the gardener figure plays a crucial role in connecting the reader to the deep history of the land on a narratological level. He quite literally provides an on-the-ground perspective that, in a distinctly human way, connects with the physical world around him through his interaction with the land. In his reading of the text, Goodbody identifies the gardener as a key to Erpenbeck's perspective on the Anthropocene, because he argues, this seemingly humble gardener is "interpreted as a figure calling on readers to acknowledge the agentic forces of nonhuman nature" ("Heimat" 139). Still, Goodbody does not elaborate on how the gardener instantiates nonhuman, agentic forces. I suggest that the gardener figure allows Erpenbeck to represent a paradigmatic sense of material grounding in the novel—what I call a grounded perspective—and to do so by connecting the timescales of human and nonhuman history. Each time the novel returns to the gardener and his careful attention to the property, the repeated tropes of cultivation and blue clay tangibly reconnect the deep, nonhuman history first encountered in the prologue to the events of the twentieth century. In the case of *Heimsuchung*, focalization through the gardener allows for such human experience of geologic time that is otherwise absent from the text.

In the eleven chapters about the gardener in *Heimsuchung*, focalization intensifies as the story unfolds. At first, the gardener's care of the property provides an on-the-ground perspective of place tied to temporal models more familiar to humans like days, seasons and years. Eventually, the gardener's connection to the environment becomes a reminder of the deep history depicted in the prologue through his grounded perspective. His care of the property is meticulous and seasonal, details that enhance the cyclic structure of the novel, and the narration of the chapters in which his diligent work is

depicted is consistently formulated in present tense. When he cares for his bees, for example, "Er düngt, gießt, beschneidet, wechselt die Waben, schleudert den Honig..."[357] (109), and when he tends the grounds, "Der Gärtner jätet, erntet, harkt, verbrennt, sägt, spaltet, räuchert aus und deckt mit Zweigen von Fichte ab"[358] (109). His work aligns with specific seasons, like harvesting apples and pears each winter, and these events mark the passing of time in a way accessible and familiar to the reader.

The grounded perspective of narration, by contrast, relates back to the geologic past, and becomes apparent through the gardener's careful observation of the earth's layers as he digs into the ground on three occasions. These passages connect the reader to the deep past and position the eleven other humans and their narratives within the same geologic timescale. The emphasis on the earth's layers is striking, in part due to their repeated description by Erpenbeck and because the gardener seems to be the only human character who notices them. The narrator supplies a detailed description of the layers, which stands out in the chapters that otherwise detail the gardener's active work (cf. the lists of active verbs). The passage immerses the reader in the act of digging and directs the reader's attention to the various layers:

> Beim Graben stößt er nach einer dünnen Schicht aus Humus auf die Ortsteinschicht, die er durchschlägt, am wellenförmigen Verlauf der grundwasserführenden Sandschicht, die darunter verläuft, kann man erkennen,

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[357] "He fertilizes, waters, prunes, swaps out the frames in the beehives, extracts the honey" (83).
[358] "the gardener weeds, harvests, rakes, burns, saws splits, smokes out and covers beds with spruce twigs" (83).

wie vor Jahrtausenden der Wind über den See strich, und unter dem Sand schließlich liegt, wie überall hier in der Gegend, der blaue Ton.[359] (62)

Through a material perspective, we can view these layers as records of nonhuman history and changes. The sentence begins with the action of the gardener digging—"Beim Graben stößt er…"—but the perspective then switches to the impersonal third person to describe the wave pattern on the sand layer—"kann man erkennen"—opening up the act of perception to the reader. Furthermore, the wave pattern in the sand provides a material trace of the lake's formation detailed in the prologue. An earlier passage similarly describes the earth's layers and how the prehistoric winds "eternalized" themselves in the sand, leaving a material trace of the deep past (32). Visually conspicuous, the blue clay in particular serves as a connection to the lake's formation as the foundation on top of which the lake forms. The prologue describes how a piece the glacier, severed "vom Körper zu dem es einst gehört hat"[360] turns into water; then "Wo [das Wasser] nicht tiefer dringen konnte, weil der Boden schon satt war, sammelte es sich über dem blauen Ton und stieg an"[361] (10). Each subsequent encounter with the blue clay evokes the dynamic formation of the landscape so long ago and serves as a reminder that those same forces are still at play. As a whole, the description of the earth's layers connects the deep past with the present; focalized through the gardener, the reader is invited underground to

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[359]As he digs he works his way through a thin layer of humus and then strikes bedrock and breaks through it, uncovering a layer of sand with groundwater coursing through it that displays a wave like pattern showing how, thousands of years ago, the wind blew across the lake, and finally beneath this sand is the blue clay found everywhere in the region (18-19, 45, 83).

[360] "from the body it had once belonged to" (2).

[361] "When it could not penetrate any deeper because the ground was already saturated, it collected on top of the blue clay and rose up" (2).

discover this history. Thus, the focalization accomplished through the gardener provides tangible evidence of an encounter with the nonhuman world. As the gardener digs through the layers, the act produces meaning for the reader: through him Erpenbeck repeatedly reinserts the geologic back in to the narrative.

The description of the ground's layers registers the gardener's work, as some of the layers require extra care from humans, for example, in order to make soil fertile more quickly than would occur naturally. The uppermost layer, humus, is made up of decomposing organic matter that releases valuable nutrients for the soil and plants. Those who compost at home are familiar with the dark earth that can be beneficial for gardening, but that also requires to be turned and aerated for oxygen to spread and to encourage buildup of nutrients like nitrogen in order to speed up organic processes. Likewise, the hardpan/bedrock (*Ortsteinschicht*) and clay (*Ton*) are both tightly packed and therefore limited in terms of the movement of water and roots. As such they must be loosened in order for plants to grow well. Topsoil such as the narrator describes here requires attentive human work to become fertile, which the gardener does, and which allows for the numerous fruit trees, bushes, and flowering plants the residents ask him to plant to flourish. By focusing on the earth's layers, Erpenbeck reveals the material and biotic processes that sustain life and place demands on the gardener.

Erpenbeck's foregrounding of nonhuman history opens the possibility of "reading" the natural environment and its history through these layers. Schöll concludes that *Heimsuchung* "präsentiert Geschichte nicht nur als eine Sammlung menschlicher Erzählungen, sondern vor allem als *Geschichtetes* in ur-materieller Form: als Schichtung

von Erde und Gestein"[362] ("Wörter" 41, original emphasis). Playing with the shared roots of *Geschichte* (history, story) and *geschichtet* (layered), Schöll draws out some of the claims made by scholars in material ecocriticism about storied matter. The blue clay evokes the dynamic formation of the landscape so long ago and also serves as a reminder that those same forces are still at play while the wave-like patterns on the layer of sand have been preserved for millennia. Juxtaposed, human life appears fleeting in comparison.

What also makes these passages depicting the earth's layers stand out in the eyes of the reader is the fact that the gardener is the only figure to observe them. On a number of occasions, other occupants bury and uncover personal possessions in the ground—the architect's wife, for example, sinks their dishes and silverware in the lake with help from the gardener before the Soviet troops arrive and her husband buries it all again before he flees to the West (*Heimsuchung* 93, 107). When the subtenants work in the yard and cut down a fir tree in order to straighten the phone cable, they stumble upon the architect's chest of porcelain and pull it from the ground. They marvel at their discovery, commenting "Nicht schlecht, was in einem Garten alles so wächst…,"[363] chuckling at this "Wunder der Natur"[364] to which the gardener offers only a silent nod (155-156). Children are among those who do not notice the earth's layers or clay. "Der Kinderfreund" and "Die unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin," whose relationship to the environment often resembles the gardener's more closely than that of the adults (they know the underwater

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[362] "presents history not only as a collection of human narratives, but above all as *stratification* in its primordial form: as the layered form of soil and stones."
[363] "Not bad, all the things that grow in a garden" (122).
[364] "miracle of nature" (122).

mountains, help him with work) dig up the chest with pewter beer mugs (*Zinnkrüge*) while burying something else. Despite the mixing of human and natural histories offered by unearthing human possession from the ground, only the gardener intuitively accesses the nonhuman dimension. The episode in which he pulls the chest of porcelain from the ground gives a fitting image of the mixing of human and natural history, and it also connects back to the blue clay from the prologue. Porcelain is made from kaolin, a clay substance like that coats the bottom of the lake and the garden.

Attuned to this grounded perspective, the gardener's lack of dialogue is striking to other characters, leading to rumors about him in the village. Even though direct discourse is noticeably absent throughout the entire novel, Erpenbeck's turn to indirect commentary is striking when the novel explains that "Manchen im Dorf ist der Gärtner wegen dieses Schweigens nicht ganz geheuer…"[365] and "Andere wieder halten dagegen, er spreche zwar mit den Menschen nur das Notwendigste, wenn er sich aber in einem Garten oder auf einem Feld allein wähne, hätten sie deutlich gesehen, wie er fortwährend die Lippen bewegte, während er harkte, grub, jätete oder Pflanzen beschnitt und begoß—er plaudere nun einmal lieber mit dem Grünzeug"[366] (28). Yet in addition to the plants with which he ostensibly converses, the gardener also speaks with children who live on or visit the property. These conversations do not appear in the form of direct discourse, but rather are traced through local stories he passes down to the children. His local knowledge is based

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[365] "Many in the village find the gardener's silence unsettling" (16), compare with my analysis of the connections between *ungeheur* and *unheimlich*.
[366] "Some, on the other hand, point out that while his communications with others are kept to a minimum, when he thinks he is alone is a garden or field, they've clearly seen him moving his lips constantly as he hoes, digs, weeds and prunes or waters plants—in other words, he prefers talking with vegetables" (16).

on an emotional connection with the land that the children also seem to share. After the garden is trampled by the Soviet troops and their horses, for example, the gardener weeps (74). The "unterseeische Berge" (underwater mountains) whose formation is detailed in the prologue are eventually given names, including the humorous one "der Nacklige" (the naked), and the gardener ultimately passes this local knowledge on to Doris, an act of narration depicted in the chapter "Der Tuchfabrikant:"

> Wie heißen nochmal die Berge am Grunde des Sees, fragt Doris ihr Großvater. Welche Berge, fragt Arthur zurück. Ludwig sagt, der Gärtner von links hat es Doris vorhin erzählt: Gurkenberg und Schwarzes Horn, Keperling, Hoffte, Nackliger und Bluzenberg. Und Mindachs Berg. Nackliger, wiederholt das Mädchen und kichert.[367] (56)

Conspicuously, Erpenbeck does not directly depict the exchanges between the gardener and the children. Rather, she highlights the manner in which he passes his local insights on and what effect this connection with him as a storyteller who possesses the ability to tap into the deeply human capacities of oral tradition (in contrast to the reliance of novels on literacy) has on the children. Later, in the chapter "Das Mädchen" Doris recalls the underwater mountains while hiding in the cramped, dark closet:

> Gurkenberg und Schwarzes Horn, Keperling, Hoffte, Nackliger und Bulzenberg. Und Mindachs Berg. Als der Onkel sie damals auf den Buckel der Kiefer

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[367] "Tell me again what the mountains at the bottom of the lake are called, Doris asks her grandfather. What mountains, Arthur asks in response. Ludwig says, the gardener from the neighbor's on the left just told Doris about them: Gurkenberg and Black Horn, Keperling, Hoffte, the Nackliger and Bulzenberg. And Mindach's Hill. Nackliger, the girl repeats, giggling" (40).

> hinaufhob, war ihr, als könne von so hoch oben tatsächlich all die unterseeischen Berge im Wasser erkennen, deren Namen ihr der Gärtner gesagt, und die sie sich bis heute gemerkt hat.[368] (80)

Her memories of the lake and the underwater mountains offer Doris comfort and solace as she hides. The names of the mountains give her concrete specificity that allows her to imagine herself back at the lake. Other examples of the gardener passing on local knowledge include when he sits with the son of "die Schriftstellerin," who asks him questions about the life of the bees (111). He teaches the "Kinderfreund" and the "unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin" how to position a leaf in one's hands to make a whistling noise (161). Human storytelling and local knowledge invite an emotional connection to humans and nonhuman alike. Looking literally beneath the surface of human history, as the gardener does, reveals the natural history of the region.

Conclusion

As we have seen In *Heimsuchung*, Erpenbeck engages with the representational challenges of telling human and nonhuman stories poised on the threshold between orality and literacy through her use of focalization to create grounded perspective. The human stories she tells are often haunting because of the violence depicted. The chapter on "der Rotarmist" details how a young solider enlists in the army voluntarily after his mother, father and sister were killed by German soldiers and through his story,

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[368] "Gurkenberg and Black Horn, Keperling, Hoffte, Nackliger and Bulzenberg. And Mindach's Hill. When her uncle lifted her up that day to the hump of the pine tree, it seemed to her as if from high up like that she really could recognize all the undersea mountains in the water whose names the gardener had told her and which she still remembered today" (59).

Erpenbeck follows the effects of war and violence in a meaningful way, even though he is only at the lake property for one night (95). The chapters "Der Tuchfabrikant" and "Das Mädchen" depict the persecution and murder of Jews during the Holocaust. The chapter "Der Kinderfreund" describes the disturbing rape of a twelve-year-old girl (163). As readers encounter these violent stories of the 20th century, the poetic and vivid description of the land's formation in the prologue nearly fade away, yet they are not meant to be forgotten, because they make deep time present.

Alexa Weik von Mossner remarks on the difficulty of comprehending the deep past, observing that "[g]eological time is not human time, and narrative events are only truly meaningful to us when they are experienced by someone—ideally someone we know well enough to care about" (88 RCC). As we have seen, Erpenbeck's use of focalization introduces the reader to eleven different human figures who each experience the land differently and develop an emotional connection with it. The gardener, additionally, as the only figure in the novel to appear in multiple chapters, solidifies the reader's connection to the deep past. In *Heimsuchung*, Erpenbeck tells both a human and a nonhuman story, reconciling the massive difference in their timescales through nonhuman matter that drives the narrative. Ultimately, it is the profoundly grounded perspective that underscores the terrible human violence that haunts the present.

Chapter 5: Geologic Narration and Glaciers

In Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Heimsuchung* (*Visitation*), the opening pages detail how, twenty-four thousand years ago, a glacier carves out an area outside of Berlin, creating and closing channels, crushing trees and eventually creates a small lake along the way. The glacier is a powerful force of the deep past that exerts an "ungeheuren Druck"[369] as it moves across the earth's surface (9). The mighty body of ice grinds rocks into sand that then forms the bottom of a lake, whose water pools up from melted portions of the glacier. In contrast to contemporary representations of glaciers, Erpenbeck's extensive description frames the glacier as a robust force and highlights its unique and dynamic material makeup, reaching beyond representations of the glacier as only a solid mass to exploring its various forms and states. For example, Erpenbeck describes how the ice "works" in years when the mass stands still, "…und das Eis began seine Arbeit, den Schlaf" (9),[370] and how the outside layer of ice melts in warmer years, creating a glassy surface upon which the body of ice can then continue moving smoothly. Deposits of ice from the glacier lodge into hollow spaces and eventually melt to form lakes in warm temperatures. The glacier melts into water which then "versickerte in die Erde, verdunstete in der Luft und regnete wieder herab, als Wasser begann es, zwischen Himmel und Erde zu kreisen" (10).[371] In *Heimsuchung*, the glacier is not only a solid

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[369] "enormous pressure" (1), this and following translations of *Heimsuchung* are from Susan Bernofsky's 2010 English translation.
[370] "…and the ice began its labor, a labor of sleep" (1).
[371] "seeped into the earth, evaporated in the air and then rained back down again, circulating in the form of water between heaven and earth" (2).

mass of ice; it is also energy, water, particles, sand, part of a system and cycle of water, and a re-imagining of the agency of glaciers set in the deep past.

Erpenbeck's portrayal of glaciers as powerful, dynamic and existing in various states stands in striking contrast to other contemporary representations, where they are often presented, correctly, as endangered, melting and receding. The key difference between these two representations is temporal; with a geologic timescale that spans hundreds of thousands of years, a glacier's movement and power can be identified along with the various manifestations in its form instead of a snapshot view that restricts representation to a single state. I argue that representations of glaciers in the deep past like Erpenbeck's offer a more productive (for understanding humans' relation to the environment) and less problematic alternative to presenting glaciers as disappearing. Glaciers in the geologic past are a trope that runs throughout the three works I discuss in the preceding chapters, Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung*, Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* (*Man in the Holocene*), and Peter Handke's *Langsame Heimkehr* (*Slow Homecoming*), in which the nonhuman environment is a dynamic force that plays an essential role in the narrative. In exploring geologic dimensions of the nonhuman environment, Frisch, Handke and Erpenbeck open up a temporal scale that is largely unexamined in scholarship in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities because it extends far beyond human history into the deep past, yet it is precisely this temporal dimension that allows for an alternative imagining of glaciers. In what I call geologic narration, Frisch, Handke and Erpenbeck apply various narrative techniques in order to incorporate the geologic past into their fiction, which I will briefly summarize before considering the glacial trope more thoroughly.

In Max Frisch's 1979 novella *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*,[372] the vast timescale of geologic history is presented in a straightforward way through physical clippings from reference works and handwritten notes that punctuate the text. One handwritten note in particular clearly depicts the scale of the geologic past by listing out various geologic periods and epochs, noting how long each lasted and ranging from one million to one hundred million years ago (*Holozän* 29). Written clearly in block letters with the zeros and decimal points neatly aligned, the immense scale of geologic history is made accessible to the reader. In another example of the deep past in the novella, an encyclopedia clipping on "Geologische Formationen"[373] clearly elucidates the extent of nonhuman nature as a powerful force that created entire mountain ranges, valleys, canyons and much more over the course of millions of years (49). The recognition of nonhuman forces as agents of change creates the background against which Herr Geiser's fears of a natural disaster play out; because he acknowledges the nonhuman forces that shaped the area so long ago, he is aware that the landscape around him is not fixed and that there are a multitude of nonhuman forces at play, including weather systems and rain, in forming the world he inhabits.

While Frisch represents the geologic past through encyclopedia entries and handwritten notes, Peter Handke chooses to personify them in the form of the protagonist in his novel *Langsame Heimkehr* (1979). Valentin Sorger embodies geologic knowledge

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[372] The English translation of Frisch's novel is titled *Man in the Holocene*, though the literal English translation is "man appears in the Holocene."
[373] "Geological Formations" (47), this and following English translations are from Geoffrey Skelton's translation (quoting here from the version first published in *The New Yorker*, will update with published book for dissertation).

through his work as a geologist and he is actively engaged with producing and questioning the scholarship encountered in Frisch's reference books. Sorger carefully observes natural formations during field work in the Alaskan Yukon in an attempt to understand the landscape's "Formen und deren Entstehung"[374] (*Langsame* 11). Handke's dense novel highlights the cognitive dissonance that can arise from human's attempt to grasp the scale of geologic time. As Sorger explains the difficulty to his colleague in comprehending "Alter und Entstehung verschiedenartiger Formen in ein und derselben Landschaft und ihr Verhältnis zueinander…,"[375] he remarks that imagining such timescales leads him to dizzying fantasies (63). Frisch attempts to grasp the deep past through presenting a neatly-ordered list of geologic periods, while Handke, by contrast, reflects the nearly incomprehensible scales of geologic time in his complex prose.

In *Heimsuchung*, Erpenbeck tackles the scale of geologic time by embedding an extended description of the landscape's formation into the narrative. The geological panorama of the prologue details how the setting of the novel, a lake outside of Berlin, was formed by a glacier thousands of years ago, which raises essential questions about narrative concerning who narrates events of the geologic past. Although the material changes detailed in the prologue occurred well before humans, they are traced throughout the book through the chapter structure that alternates between eleven different human inhabitants of the land and the mysterious gardener. The geologic past remains available to humans through physical traces, yet the gardener is the only figure in the novel who

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[374] "forms and their genesis" (5), this and following English translations are from Benjamin Kunkel's 1985 translation.
[375] "the age and genesis of different forms in the same landscape and their relation to one another" (39).

encounters it when he repeatedly digs through the earth's layers to a layer of blue clay that was formed by the glacier detailed in the prologue.

The geologic narration of Frisch, Handke and Erpenbeck opens fiction to the vast timescale of the geologic past and allows for distinct formulations of certain tropes, including that of the glacier. Considering glaciers on a geologic scale positions them as dynamic and powerful entities and reveals some aspects of the complicated relationship between human perceptions and experience on the one hand and temporal (and spatial) scales on the other. Literary representations of glaciers in the geologic past require innovative modes of narration as well as an (accurate as possible) understanding of the geologic processes at play, which results in a distinct combination of fiction and nonfiction in the texts. Literature can help its readers understand the complexity of environmental problems, the magnitude of the geologic past and how humans fit into the broader picture. Additionally, it offers representations of nonhuman nature that are not static and that show how nonhuman nature is an agentic force—a reality that humans must consider in their attempts to cope with changes and the no-analog climate conditions of the future.[376]

In order to show how geologic narration combines nonhuman agencies, human perceptions and temporal dimensions, I will turn to a brief discussion of theory and to the example of glaciers to focus my arguments. There are two highly relevant approaches to analyze these texts: material ecocriticism and historical geology. Theories of material ecocriticism can help us understand the agentic capacity of nonhuman nature, especially

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[376] See Williams and Jackson and Williams, et al. for a discussion of no-analog futures.

as it relates to nonhuman dimensions of "narrative agency" in literary representations, yet this is only the case when put in conversation with narrative theory as well. Looking at historical geology, moreover, shows both how specific knowledge is required to see the storied dimensions of the geologic past and how geology and literature are deeply reciprocal.

Material ecocriticism offers a number of approaches to literary analysis that match the complex entanglements of humans and nonhuman entities in the world by considering that all matter has agency and, therefore, the capacity to produce meaning. Scholars such as Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann and Stacy Alaimo draw from theories in quantum physics, feminist materialism and philosophy to highlight the intertwining of humans, matter and discourses. As Iovino writes, "…every material formation, from bodies to their contexts of living, is "telling", and therefore can be the object of a critical investigation aimed at discovering its stories, its material and discursive interplays, its place in a world filled with expressive – or narrative – forces" (Iovino "Living Diffractions" 70). Through the lens of material ecocriticism, matter becomes relevant; the nonhuman world is not regarded as a static object for human use, and the way humans are impacted by nonhuman factors is emphasized. For literary analysis, material ecocriticism offers a new realm for interpretation that sheds light on ways of understanding the stories that grow from nonhuman actions.

In order to continue to provide interpretive insights into literary works, however, scholars in material ecocriticism must engage more with narrative theory, exploring fundamental parallels between the two frameworks. One recent example that combined narrative theory with an ecocriticism approach in a postcolonial context is Erin James'

2015 monograph *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, in which she explores the environmental dimensions of a text's storyworld and how the cognitive cues involved in creating a storyworld can add to a careful appreciation of space. Econarratology, she writes, is "a mode of reading that combines ecocriticism's interest in the relationship between literature and the physical environment and narratology's focus on the literary structures and devices by which narratives are composed" (242). Scholarship in material ecocriticism should follow James' example, as I attempt in the previous chapters, to consider the real, material dimensions of a text's storyworld.

A material ecocriticism approach frames matter as storied, which is a parallel to the beginnings of geology as a discipline, the second theoretical framework of interest to my investigation into geologic narration. Adelene Buckland explores the influence of fiction and narrative practices on the development of geology as a discipline in her book *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology*. At a time when boundaries between nonfiction and fiction did not exist, she writes, that "…problems in literary form were often used as a conceptual tool for thinking through the problems of geological form. Geologists were keen to experiment with the ways in which different forms of writing could help them see the 'truth' better…" (18). Novels, their narrative practices and use of literary devices helped geologists imagine the deep past they were trying to reconstruct. Literature, therefore, "had a vital role to play in creating geology as a modern science, both by attracting new readers and by shaping the artistic and literary conventions by which former worlds could be understood" (14). In the three works of fiction I investigate here, the authors each engage with nonfiction in profound ways,

presenting a combination of fiction and nonfiction that is part of considering nonhuman material agencies in geologic fiction. The nonhuman forces that create land formations in the geologic past are often unseen in representations of nonhuman nature. This is, perhaps, a result of the challenges presented by imagining changes that occurred in the deep past. Scientific knowledge of geologic and natural processes is at the center of these works and is central to constructing narratives that reflect humans' position in the world, especially in relation to the nonhuman environment. It should not be surprising, then, that the authors of the works I've analyzed here all worked closely with nonfiction sources in order to tell geologic stories that are often unseen.

Returning to the storied matter of material ecocriticism, Iovino writes that storied matter "stresses the fact that matter's dynamism is 'sedimented' in a temporal dimension and can be known accordingly" ("Living Diffractions" 74). Combined with historical geology, the temporal dimension of storied matter reveals a much greater storied past and material ecocriticism provides the tools to understand how this appears in the literature. The two theoretical frameworks offer complimentary approaches: geology, on the one hand, is concerned with the forces that shape the physical world and material ecocriticism, on the other, considers the forces (human, nonhuman and discursive) that shape the discursive or textual world and the meaning created as a result. Moreover, both approaches are deeply tied to human perceptions. Combining these two theoretical positions reveals a number of common themes regarding the representation of glaciers in the deep past that stand in contrast to familiar, contemporary representations.

In contemporary discourses surrounding climate change, glaciers have become a major symbol demonstrating the real threat of global warming. More specifically, melting

or receding glaciers offer a representation of the effects of climate change that can be easily seen through, for example, photographs taken over a number of years that demonstrate the decreasing size of glaciers or ice sheets, even though the consequences of glacier loss reach far beyond what can be captured visually. Julie Doyle analyzes climate change communication and considers how photographic representations of shrinking glaciers are problematic and can be counterproductive to sparking action to combat global warming. Photographs of diminishing glaciers used to raise climate change awareness and promote action contain a temporal dissonance that ultimately undermines the goal of publishing such images. This is because the time period in which action could have been taken to prevent the glacier from melting is far prior to the time the photograph was taken. Doyle writes that "photographs of retreating glaciers depict an already affected environment, illustrating the current reality of climate change through the image, and at the same time signifying the failure of preventative action required to halt its acceleration" (280). This is especially the case with photographic representations because photography is often falsely perceived as a completely objective mode of representation. Moreover, the photograph presents a static moment in time and only one single manifestation of the many forms of a glacier. Ultimately, Doyle concludes that visual documentation of melting glaciers "does not enable the future to be understood in the present" because "[p]hotography cannot visualize the future as a present threat" (294).[377]

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[377] Furthermore, representations of diminishing glaciers position them as emblems of scarcity and can lead to a boom in "last chance tourism" or "extinction tourism," in which glaciers and other formations threatened by changes in the climate (coral reefs are another notable example) become coveted tourist destinations (Dawson, et al. 251). The increase in travelers to these areas adds to the greenhouse gas emissions that lead to global warming.

As a trope in German literature, representations of glaciers tend to fall into two predictable categories that are similarly problematic: glaciers as objects of Arctic exploration and as a symbol for climate change. Glaciers are prominent in a number of German-language novels published after 1945 that feature Arctic and polar exploration.[378] The 1983 work of historical fiction, *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit* (*The Discovery of Slowness*) by Sten Nadolny, for example, reimagines the life of British explorer John Franklin, following Franklin from his youth throughout his many expeditions to Australia and the Northwest Passage and showing how the slowness Franklin was teased for as a kid becomes a virtue while he and his crew are shipwrecked.[379] Austrian author Christoph Ransmayr's debut novel from 1984, *Das Schrecken des Eises und der Fintsternis* (*The Terrors of Ice and Darkness*), tells of the protagonist's attempt to retrace the Austro-Hungarian polar expedition of 1872-1874 by Julius von Payer and Karl Weyprecht.[380]

The second category of glaciers in German literature, as symbols for the effects of climate change, is perhaps best exemplified in the 2011 novel *Eistau* (*Melting Ice*) by the Bulgarian-German author Ilija Trojanow. The novel follows the protagonist Zeno

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[378] As Dawson, et al. write, the desire in exploration to be "first" to a certain destination is similar to what motivates people to engage in last chance tourism (251).
[379] Nadolny's novel shares some similarities to another work of historical fiction, Daniel Kehlmann's 2005 bestseller *Die Vermessung der Welt* (*Measuring the World*), whose narrative alternates between the German mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss and the explorer Alexander von Humboldt. Though Kehlmann's novel doesn't focus on Arctic exploration, there are parallel themes of human exploration of spaces perceived to be uncharted or undiscovered that ultimately are presented as human dominance over nature.
[380] Similarly, Ransmayr's 2006 novel *Der Fliegende Berg* (*The Flying Mountain*), recounts two Irish brothers' fatal attempt to summit the fictional Tibetan mountains Phur-Ri.

Hintermeier, a glaciologist who leaves his research position to work as a lecturer on a cruise ship guiding vacationers through the Arctic.[381] Hintermeier struggles to reconcile his passion for glaciers and ice with the ship's privileged passengers who are indifferent about their contribution to the warming climate and seek out the very landscapes their actions threaten. The chapters are arranged as Hintermeier's diary entries marked with the date and the ships position and, as in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, are interrupted with signs of the "outside world"—advertising jingles, news flashes and radio announcements from the ship—but these interjections appear as jumbled italicized prose rather than as embedded images. Similar to Frisch, Trojanow contrasts the individual human with the collective human species, albeit in a more direct way. Before hijacking the ship, leaving its passengers stranded and ostensibly steering it to his own death, Hintermeier gives voice to critical debates surrounding the Anthropocene, writing in his journal, "Der einzelne Mensch ist ein Rätsel, einige Milliarden Menschen, organisiert in einem parasitären System, sind eine Katastrophe"[382] (167). The trope of melting glaciers is found in climate change novels, of which there are relatively few in the German language context. One recent example of note is *Der letzte Schnee* (*The Last Snow*, 2018) by Swiss author Arno Camenisch, which takes place at a ski resort in Switzerland. In the novel, two ski lift attendants are left with nothing do because of a lack of snow that keep skiers and tourists away. Anthropogenic climate change is clearly the reason for the changing weather patterns and snow conditions, setting the backdrop for the rest of the

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[381] See Dürbeck and Goodbody for analyses of Trojanow's novel.
[382] "The individual person is a mystery/riddle, several billion people organized in a parasitic system are a catastrophe" (my translation).

novel that reflects on growing up in the area and the changing times that are connected to fluctuations in the climate.

Overall, these novels focus largely on individual figures and their relationship with glaciers, aligning with Romantic views that preserve nature as a static object and reified as separate from the human. In the polar exploration novels of the 1980s, the individual is the main focus and driver to explore the Arctic region and the turn to historical examples of exploration evokes parallels with William Cronon's problematization of the concept of wilderness. In these novels, the authors create desired, uninhabited wilderness through their depictions of unexplored Arctic regions and exemplify one of Cronon's paradoxes of the concept of wilderness: perceived as a place entirely separate of humans, the presence of humans in such a place undermines it as wilderness (80-81). Though Trojanow's overall commentary reflects contemporary environmental awareness, a similar Romantic view of glaciers is what drives Hintermeier in *Eistau*.

In contrast to static representations of nonhuman nature, material ecocriticism shifts the focus to the agentic capacity of matter and the meanings produced by intra-actions of nonhuman and humans. This lens combined with geology's insight into the nonhuman forces that shape the physical world can offer novel distinctive analytical approaches for literary texts and glaciers in particular. The three works of fiction by Frisch, Handke and Erpenbeck that I analyze in the previous chapters embody material dimensions, a vast temporal scale and human perceptions. Looking at the example of glaciers in particular, we can see how geologic narration decenters the human to open interpretive dimensions to the nonhuman world. In the texts I analyze, glaciers are

present in their various forms—as a powerful force, a threat to humans, in the landscapes they carve out and the traces they leave behind.

In *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, Frisch focuses mainly on historical geology and the forces that create the physical world. Glaciers in the novella are present in a number of states; they are a powerful force that shaped the area, a future threat to coastal regions and the creators of rocky moraines. Together, Frisch represents glaciers as fluid and dynamic entities that exist beyond and before human agency, alongside it and as a threat to it. An encyclopedia entry details how glaciers carved the ridges and valleys of the Swiss alpine region during the ice age: "Im einzelnen zeigen die [Alpen] vielerorts die allen einst vergletscherten Gebirgen eignen Spuren der nicht nur schleifenden und polierenden, sondern auch splitternden und brechenden glazialen Erosion: rundgebuckelte Hänge, die sich an der Schliffgrenze von den zackigen, scharfen, nicht vergletscherten Graten abheben…"[383] (*Holozän* 49). The result of the powerful glaciers' movement can be seen in the present moment of narration and is of great interest to the protagonist, Herr Geiser, who recognizes the multifaceted dimensions of glaciers and the traces they left in the landscape. The narrator describes how these traces from the ice age glaciers are managed by humans when, for example, widening a road. The moraines are described as glacial remnants from the deep past; "Schutt von den großen Gletschern der Eiszeit; die Moräne ist so hart, daß gesprengt werden muss… kurz darauf prasselt es,

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[383] "In many parts of the Alps individual mountains, all of them once covered with glaciers, reveal traces not only of the grinding and polishing effect of glaciers but also of erosion as a result of splitting or fracturing: round, knobbed slopes standing out against the sharp jagged ridges the glaciers left untouched…" (47).

Kies und Geröll aus der Eiszeit"[384] (58). Twice Herr Geiser notes that "wenn das Eis der Arktis schmilzt, so ist New York unter Wasser"[385] (70, 103) and that the glaciers "sind überall im Rückzug"[386] (57). As I mention in Chapter 2, although these statements are made without direct reference to anthropogenic causes, the connection is implied in other instances in the novella. Frisch positions the rising sea level as a direct threat to humans and thereby shows the limits of human agency; human actions lead to the melting of glaciers, which ultimately leaves humans vulnerable.

Most strikingly, Frisch includes geologic knowledge in the novella through the physical clippings from nonfiction works that appear in the text. As I elaborate in Chapter 2, the clippings produce a unique narrative in their own right according to their arrangement, both when taken separate from the text and when considered as interacting with the text. In terms of human perception, the geologic knowledge portrayed in the clippings is entirely human. The aging protagonist struggles to come to terms with the finitude of his life and his knowledge, which Frisch juxtaposes with the much greater scales of the history of the planet and collective human knowledge. In a time where climate change deniers speak out and the United States' Environmental Protection Agency wipes mention of climate change from their website (Friedman), Frisch's use of nonfiction could serve as a model for environmental fiction in the Anthropocene.

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[384] "debris from the huge glaciers of the Ice Age; the moraine so hard that it has to be blasted… shortly afterwards the bits come rattling down, pebbles and gravel from the Ice Age" (49).
[385] "If the Arctic ice were to melt, New York would be under water" (56, 77).
[386] "are now in retreat everywhere" (49).

In contrast to Frisch, Peter Handke's geologic intervention occurs more subtly and with a main focus on the discursive forces that shape our understanding of the nonhuman world. As previously noted, the protagonist embodies geologic knowledge and uncovers the material traces of the geologic past. As I discuss in Chapter 3, Handke builds his knowledge of geologic figures from a number of textbooks he studied before and during his trips to Alaska prior to writing the novel. A list of hotels in New York City on the inside cover of one of these textbooks indicates that Handke carried it with him on his trip. As previously mentioned, one of the novel's three section titles, "Die Vorzeitformen" ("The Primordial/Prehistoric Forms"), comes from his study of geomorphology in Herbert Wilhelmy's *Geomorphologie in Stichwörtern* (*Geomorphology in Keywords*). Klaus Kastberger traces the influences of the textbooks even further, noting that the protagonist's first name, Valentin, most likely comes from one of the geologists listed in the bibliography of Wilhelmy's textbook: Hartmut Valentin. Handke's protagonist Valentin Sorger, therefore, literally embodies geologic knowledge.

As a geologist, Sorger observes and describes the formations around him, but often encounters the limits of human understanding through language, calling the geologic naming conventions *fragwürdig*—dubious (*Langsame Heimkehr* 19). This is perhaps why Handke does not include mention of glaciers directly; instead there are traces of glaciers embedded in his poetic prose. One example is an "Eiskegel… der sich als Blase vor tausend Jahren aufgewölbt hatte, und mit Sand und Schotter bedeck, von

außen gar nicht als Eisstück zu erkennen war"[387] that would then become a "Krater mit einem See… als hätte da in der Polnähe einmal ein kleiner Vulkan gestanden"[388] (33). Sorger's attempts to grasp the span of the geologic past ultimately push up against the limits of human agency and understanding. In the textbooks Handke studied, images and illustrations help to clarify the geologic processes in place and although Sorger grapples with issues of representation by way of images—he spends hours sketching certain areas outdoors—he never abandons writing and his geologic knowledge still permeates the text.

Erpenbeck's novel *Heimsuchung* synthesizes the two approaches discussed above, combining an investigation into forces that shape both the physical and discursive world. The prologue's depiction of the massive, powerful glacier that formed the lake outside of Berlin (and the setting of the novel) combines geologic knowledge with the distinct narrative techniques I discuss in Chapter 4. Published nearly three decades after Frisch's and Handke's novels, Erpenbeck's writing incorporates a vast temporal dimension that is, perhaps, a result of newer technologies that allow humans to comprehend the earth in vast perspectives. Additionally, *Heimsuchung*'s unique chapter structure combines numerous temporal modes: layered in the chapter structure, cyclical in the seasonal patterns and return to the gardener, generational in the inheritance of property and, as a whole, a geologic perspective.

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[387] "a cone of ice that had formed a thousand years before but could not be recognized as ice under its sheathing of sand and gravel" (19).
[388] "crater…with a lake in it, as if there had been a small volcano up there, so close to the pole" (19).

Although the material changes brought about by glaciers detailed in the prologue occur well before humans, the traces left behind by the glacier are present throughout the novel, meaning that another articulation of glaciers remains. As I elaborate in Chapter 4, the gardener is the one figure in the novel who repeatedly encounters the glacial remnants and connects the reader back to the geologic temporal dimension. On three occasions in the novel, the reader confronts the layers as the gardener digs:

> Beim Graben stößt er nach einer dünnen Schicht aus Humus auf die Ortsteinschicht, die er durchschlägt, am wellenförmigen Verlauf der grundwasserführenden Sandschicht, die darunter verläuft, kann man erkennen, wie vor Jahrtausenden der Wind über den See strich, und unter dem Sand schließlich liegt, wie überall hier in der Gegend, der blaue Ton.[389] (31-32, 62, 110)

The act of digging expands the perception of the deep past beyond the visual realm to a corporeal connection with the glacial traces represented in the layers. Each layer has a distinct composition and therefore offers a certain amount of resistance against the digger. This material and physical connection reminiscent of Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality suggests a particular attunement of the body to the surroundings, an aspect that characterizes Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* as a whole and sets her novel apart from Frisch's and Handke's. She pays careful attention to the physical body in

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[389] As he digs he works his way through a thin layer of humus and then strikes bedrock and breaks through it, uncovering a layer of sand with groundwater coursing through it that displays a wave like pattern showing how, thousands of years ago, the wind blew across the lake, and finally beneath this sand is the blue clay found everywhere in the region. (18-19, 45, 83)

Heimsuchung, from the gardener's digging to the two different female characters that are forced to hide inside small closet spaces.

The narrative dimensions of Erpenbeck's corporeal focalization that I explore in Chapter 4 point to an attentive focus on the body and embodiment present in Erpenbeck's work and one that is similarly present in other German-language fiction by female authors. In contrast to the works of fiction I listed above that deal with glaciers, works by female authors such as Christa Wolf and Monika Maron pay careful attention to the position of the human body in relation to the nonhuman environment and therefore uncover more layers and traces of the geologic past than the works focused on Arctic exploration and climate change.[390]

The works of Frisch, Handke and Erpenbeck show how an alternate imagining of glaciers is possible through careful attention to the material world and an understanding of the geologic past. Glaciers of the geologic past in particular offer a more appropriate representation of glaciers and the consequences of human-induced environmental damage by providing an alternative framing to elements of a passive environment that exist only as an object for human admiration or use. Instead, framing glaciers as powerful agents and as existing in a number of states decenters humans and repositions them as one of

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[390] Works that warrant further analysis include, in particular, Wolf's 1987 novella about daily life immediately after the Chernobyl disaster, *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages* (*Accident: A Days News*) and Maron's 1981 novel *Flugasche* (*Flight of Ashes*) about an East-German journalist who uncovers the damaging environmental and health effects of a power plant and who struggles with reporting the true story of the plan's pollution and remaining loyal to the socialist party. Other novels to note are Wolf's 1989 *Sommerstück* and Maron's *Animal Triste* (1996) and *Endmoränen* (2002) as well as Marlen Haushofer's 1963 bestseller *Die Wand*.

many agencies that make up the environment. This shift is an important reminder that humans do not have absolute control.

Glaciers, of course, are not the only way to depict the geologic past, but their multiple, shifting states come closer to representing the complexity of temporality on human and nonhuman scales. The shifting states of glaciers align with Judith Ryan's analysis of a new model of historical representation that emerged in literature in the late 1980s. Writing in 1991 and reflecting on developments in West German literature in particular, Ryan details three previous modes of history in literature as cyclical, dialectic and generational. In contrast to these phases, she considers silt as a new metaphor for history. History as silt is "[a]mbiguous, sly, insinuating, it is something that cannot be visualized in structural terms; rather, it constantly eludes our grasp; it is a process that undermines itself even as it seems to proceed" (55). Ryan points to Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* as example of silt literature that shows how personal and geologic history "continually make and unmake themselves" (58). She writes that "Frisch moves away from a conception of history as archaeology, as the uncovering of layers and towards a new conception of history as building up even as it erodes" (58). Silt is continually engaged in dynamic processes of making and unmaking, like the glacier in Erpenbeck's prologue whose outer layer melts and creates a smooth surface upon which the glacier moves forward; it sheds a part of itself that will remain as a trace while also continuing ahead to form other traces. I see two key points from Ryan's concept of history as silt that align with geologic narration. The first is the emphasis in literature on history *itself* as a narrative construction, which highlights the role of human perception in its making. The second is how Ryan's silt concept focuses on processes of active making

and unmaking, which aligns with material ecocriticism by identifying other-than-human agents in the creation of history. History as silt and geologic narration combine the forces that shape the physical world with those that shape the discursive one.

Like silt, glaciers are not static; they are indeed diminishing at an unprecedented rate. What good, then, is turning to the deep past when the future is at stake? In order to understand both the power of glaciers (and other nonhuman forces) and the alarmingly miniscule amount of time in which humans have altered the nonhuman environment to such a great degree, we need to consider the geologic past as well as the discourses that shape our understanding of it. Contemporary environmental problems require long-term solutions and geologic narration can help reorient human perceptions to a larger temporal scale. At the same time, exploring agencies of the deep past also serves as a reminder that the nonhuman environment is not a static backdrop against which human actions play out. Instead, it highlights the nonhuman environment's capacity for change and is a reminder that humans are only one part of a multitude of actors and systems at play in the world. While the geologic scale in narrative fiction does decenter the human, it in no way diminishes human lives or significance.

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